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REN & STIMPY — THE COMIC BOOK

#131

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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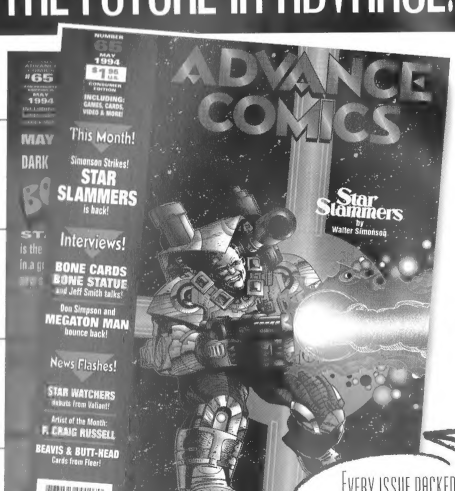

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cover art:
JOHN KRICFALUSI
original cel art

UP FRONT

BOUND — OR BAGGED?

When I was in high school, a friend's father made one of those fabled finds — a bookstore stocked floor-to-ceiling with rare pulp magazines and original cover paintings and artwork, in this case the lifelong collection of fan **Walter Dunkelberger.**

Among the treasures were multiple copies of individual issues of WEIRD TALES and, even better yet (as I thought back then — and still do now) *bound volumes* of the entire run! Since that time, I have aspired to my own library of bound volumes.

When I accepted an editorial staff position at Marvel Comics in early 1974 (there was a total of exactly *six* editorial types back then, **Roy Thomas, Don McGregor, Marv Wolfman, Tony Isabella, Chris Claremont** and myself, believe it or not!) one of the first things I did was convince **Stan Lee** that at the rate Marvel was growing, and being as dependent on continuity as it was, the only sane way to cross-check and keep on top of continuity was to get the comics bound into reference volumes.

Not long after, I also had many of my own comics bound into handsome books that still grace my study today. They are easy to access, always in order and easy to read, and very easy to store. Imagine my amazement at the assertion that this vastly superior (and certainly more costly) method supposedly *devalues* the comics in the opinion of some collectors!

I, who had to settle for single copies of WEIRD TALES way back then, instead of the coveted bound collections, by this bizarre method of reckoning, am actually ahead. But it's just not so. To this day, I still prefer the luxury of bound volumes — and I wouldn't *dream* of trading them for bagged single copies of the same comics even if those are (supposedly) worth more money.

It all comes down to this: my comics are there to be read, used, enjoyed — to enhance my life — not carefully stored away like stock certificates to speculate upon what future value they may (or may not) someday hold in someone *else's* life.

When all is said and done it is, I suppose, the difference between collecting — and living. Between having — and using. To me, bound volumes always command a premium . . . in pleasure.

DAVID

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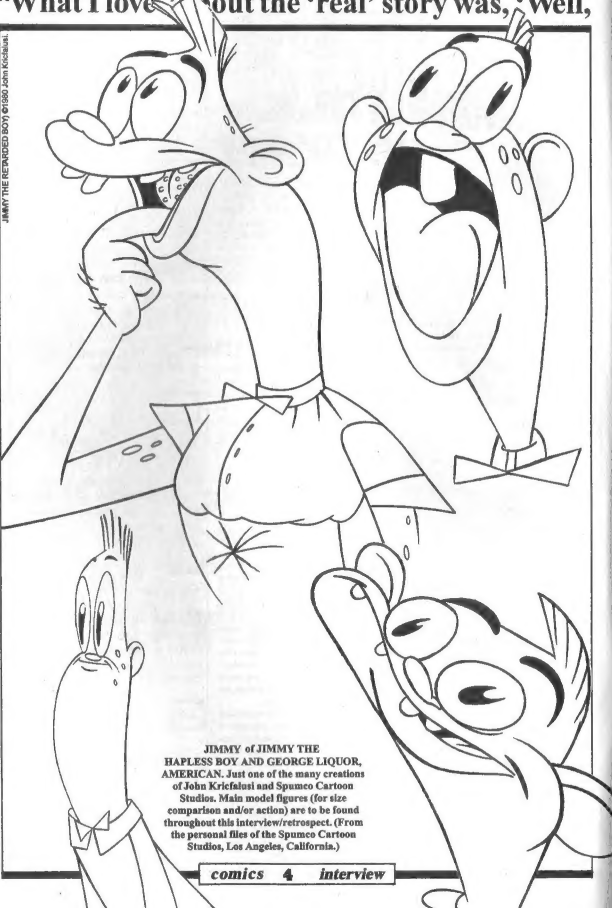
"What I love[illegible]out the 'real' story was, 'Well,



JIMMY of JIMMY THE HAPLESS BOY AND GEORGE LIQUOR, AMERICAN. Just one of the many creations of John Kricfalusi and Spumco Cartoon Studios. Main model figures (for size comparison and/or action) are to be found throughout this interview/retrospect. (From the personal files of the Spumco Cartoon Studios, Los Angeles, California.)

HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG (including Ha-Hog, Mr. Meat, Professor Mole, Mikey Mentol, He-Hog's Girlfriend, Honey Lamb, Dr. Handsbag Boghoolan, Raymond Spunk, Stinky Butt, Uranian, Dopey, Little Guy, Beefy Guy, Mid Mannered Man, Beauty Boy, Mr. Bad Guy, Mr. Bad Guy's Girlfriend, Mr. Bad Guy's Mother, Mr. Bad Guy's Father, Mr. Bad Guy's Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Grandmother, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Grandfather, Mr. Bad Guy's Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great

I wasn't there, but the way I heard it was . . ?"

PRODUCTION: | PRODUCTION #: Series 2 | MAIN

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JOHN KRICFALUSI

In the fall of 1992, for reasons that remain a mystery, control of the highly successful REN & STIMPY SHOW was taken from John Kricfalusi, the show's creator. Since then John K. has thrown himself into other projects, and noted that REN & STIMPY has languished ever further behind schedule than when under his control, while tremendous energy has been devoted to separating the series from the cartoonist-driven philosophy on which its success was achieved, to the point even of changing the credits on the episodes from the first two seasons . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *We did an issue on REN & STIMPY (COMICS INTERVIEW #122) that apparently —*

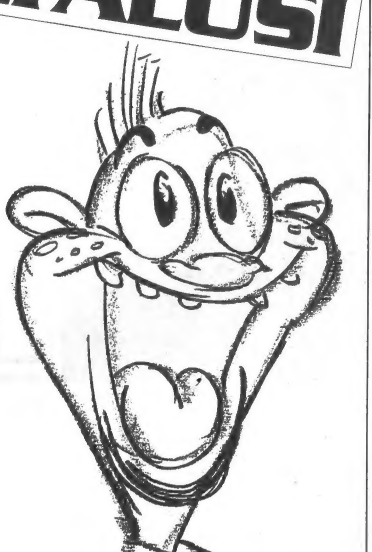
JOHN KRICFALUSI: Yes, the "real" story, absolutely from the horse's mouth! *(Laughter.)* It's a real Jim-dandy of a "real" story.

DARREL: *What was wrong with it?*

JOHN: Well, I'm sure you got the letter from **Jim Smith** (COMICS INTERVIEW #125); he outlined just about everything. What I loved about the "real" story was that **Mr. Wray** qualified every single event with, "Well, I wasn't there, but the way I heard it was . . ." I don't think that's a very professional way of getting the real story.

DARREL: *Well, since we print only interviews, we can't help what people say. And I should apologize to you. I was trying to get in touch with you last spring, hoping to have you in that issue as well, but the water started rising and other things started happening around here, and pretty soon the deadline passed by.*

JOHN: Well, I'll *gladly* send you just a list of facts about the show. And everything can be backed up with further documentation, if you ever want to do a



Rare example of the fluidity of John's action pencil drawing.

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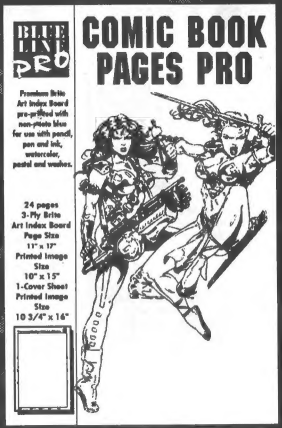
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"I *love* those comics; '60s Marvel comics are great."

real "real story." You can actually have proof to back it up, not third-hand hearsay.

DARREL: *Okay. We'll run whatever you provide along with this interview, to air your side of the story.*

JOHN: If you have some specific questions, I would be glad to answer them.

DARREL: *Let's see. There was some talk about "cheater" episodes, to make time for particular episodes — this is from Jim Smith's letter.*

JOHN: What about cheater cartoons?

DARREL: *Jim Smith mentions that this was done, the cheater cartoons. The direct quote: 'As for the idea of doing cheater cartoons to make time for particular episodes, this was done as can be seen in the episodes directed by Bob Camp: 'Out West,' 'In the Army,' and 'Monkey See, Monkey Don't' were done quickly so that special episodes like 'Son of Stimpy,' 'Kilted Yaksmen,' and 'Visit to Anthony' could be done with more quality."*

JOHN: That's accurate. In fact, we've been doing that since the beginning of the series. I guess they must have given up on that, now that they're only three months late — I guess they're *all* quality episodes. *(Laughter.)* The last two weeks are missing. Those must be *really* good.

DARREL: *I haven't seen any lately.*

JOHN: There's only been two of them out, that's why. And three out of the four cartoons in those two were written by us. I even drew some of it. In fact, there's one episode — Bill mentioned in that issue how you'd be seeing "new" characters this season, then he listed a bunch that we invented. There's another one, a bear character in "No Pants Today," written by **Richard Purcel.** There's one sequence that we *didn't* write that the new studio (Games) added, and they wrote it around this bear character who appears in the woods for no reason — it has nothing to do with the story. Interestingly, all the drawings of the bear are *my* drawings. *(Laughter.)* It's kind of *flattering* in a way — in a weird, twisted way — to see that they just can't let go of our material. They must have found a bunch of my drawings in the trash or something. They found a bunch of drawings that I did of a bear; they had nothing to do with REN & STIMPY, nothing whatsoever, and they wrote a sequence around them!

DARREL: *This sounds strange.*

JOHN: It's pretty funny. They must be skulking around out here, looking for stuff we're throwing out. "Here's some of John's drawings; let's write this into the show!" I think they think that anything that I ever did is public domain.

DARREL: *I was interested in reading through some of this stuff about how you pitch stories, bouncing off walls and stuff. This interested me because it sounds very similar to what Stan Lee used to do, working with the artists at Marvel in the '60s.*

JOHN: He did, he used to bounce off the walls?

DARREL: *From some of the stories I've heard, he would jump up on desks, really get into acting out the story.*

JOHN: Did **Jack Kirby** roll his eyes while he was doing this? *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *He might have.*

JOHN: There's quite a bit of controversy about that period in history, too. Actually, I *love* those comics; the '60s Marvel comics are really great.

DARREL: *Yes, FANTASTIC FOUR —*

JOHN: That's my favorite one.

DARREL: *Anyway, I was wondering, when you're acting out the stories, how much of what you do is stuff you know ahead of time, and how much would be, like, coming out of the moment?*

JOHN: Well, it depends. If we've

"Off the cuff I acted out a whole cartoon, REN'S BRAIN."

already written the story, I'll usually go around and *test* it on everyone. For example, we wrote this story called "Ren's Brain" . . . it wasn't even "written," really. Basically, we were having a gag session at the studio, all the writers were there, and off the cuff I acted out a whole cartoon called "Ren's Brain." We had a premise for it, but it wasn't really going anywhere, so we started knocking it around. In that particular case, we basically came up with the whole story from beginning to end within a few minutes. It was just stream of consciousness.

That night, before it was ever even written — I gave it to **Rich Purcell** to write — that night I called up **Bob Jaques** at Carbunkle because I was all excited about the story, acted it out for him on the phone to see if he liked it. I kind of threw the phone against the wall to make up for him not being able to see me bounce up against the wall. *(Laughter.)* So, you know, there's different stages of the story. We write a story outline, then we write a storyboard and the storyboard artist adds material in the storyboard, then I write the dialogue. And at any of those stages we'll act it out for people, always with lots of sweat and spit.

DARREL: *The reason I bring this up is, the creative process is kind of a fascination for me. Where invention comes into it is one of the things that fascinates me the most. Like, the writer sits in his lonely room but how much of what he's writing goes back to stuff he saw two months ago when he was having dinner or whatever? "Ren's Brain," isn't that the one with the helmet?*

JOHN: "Ren's Brain" hasn't been made. They weren't too keen on it at Nickelodeon; it was one of the weird ones.

DARREL: *The one I remember with the helmet —*

JOHN: "Stimpy's Invention."

DARREL: *— that was hilarious. I thought that was the episode you were talking about.*

JOHN: No, but "Stimpy's Invention" kind of happened like that, too. **Bob Camp** came up with an idea called "Stimpy's Inventions." Basically the story was about Stimpy coming up with wacky inventions. I said, "Well, that's kind of been done a million times in cartoons, but maybe we'll do it." It was originally planned to be one of the cheaters. We were driving home one day, he was driving me home, and we were talking about the cartoon. We were talking about how Ren was going to get madder and madder as each invention blew up in his face or backfired or whatever. I said, "Look, why don't we have him have a *real* fit and go insane at one point, and then Stimpy decides he's going to make the invention to end all inventions, the invention that's going to *cure* Ren. He comes up with the Happy Helmet that forces Ren to be happy."

Then we went back and forth with it — we were laughing our heads off — and we basically came up with the whole story in the car. Then we went back and wrote it up in a couple of days, and it went to storyboard, then got mutilated by Nickelodeon. *(Laughter.)* Then I begged them to put a bunch of stuff back in, and the cartoon came out almost exactly like what we came up with in the car that night. Of course, with *much* cooler drawings. *(Laughter.)* The drawings really added a hell of a lot. A lot of those drawings are **Bob Camp's**, really brilliant drawings. The animation didn't hurt it, either.

DARREL: *Well, that's another thing about the show — the style, whatever it is . . . there's like a '50s or '40s throwback-type thing going on, but it's not as finished. I was kind of shocked when I saw it. I hadn't seen anything like that on television.*

JOHN: You'll see a lot of it now! *(Laughter.)* Everybody's imitating it.

FANTASTIC FOUR ©1981 Marvel Entertainment Group.

John's favorite comic book during childhood was Marvel's FANTASTIC FOUR, by Lee and Kirby. Here's one of co-creator Jack Kirby's last FF pieces ever — the cover of #181 (1977) — later inked, with substantial changes, by Joe Sinnott.

"I think comic books for the most part *suck* today."

Even REN & STIMPY is imitating it.

DARREL: (Laughter.) *We thought you had some projects that were ready to go when we contacted you about doing this interview, but you said —*

JOHN: We can talk about the stuff. It doesn't matter to me.

DARREL: *One of the things is COMIC BOOK (™Spumco) for Marvel Comics.*

JOHN: Make sure when you print COMIC BOOK (™Spumco) you wrote "™Spumco" *(Laughter.)* That's an *inspired* name. We don't want anyone to steal that name! *(Laughter.)* We *own* COMIC BOOK (™Spumco).

DARREL: *Nobody else can use the term. That's hilarious.*

JOHN: Right!

DARREL: *The advance stuff that we got on this says it will recreate for adults the experience they had when they were children and discovered comic books for the first time. How accurate is that description?*

JOHN: That's *exactly* what we're trying to do.

DARREL: *Then how are you going to —*

JOHN: Personally, I think comic books for the most part *suck* today. They're *boring* and they're *ugly* and they're *serious*, and too, too busy. Everybody's running around with their veins popping out, screaming vigilantes, you know. I can't believe people running around in leotards are taken seriously. *Lighten up!* Come on, let's go back to what comics really are; they're just supposed to be *fun!* You're not supposed to take them seriously. In fact, COMIC BOOK (™Spumco) is going to be *bigger* than regular comic books, too, like the feeling you had when you were a kid with this nice, big, meaty comic. We're bigger now.

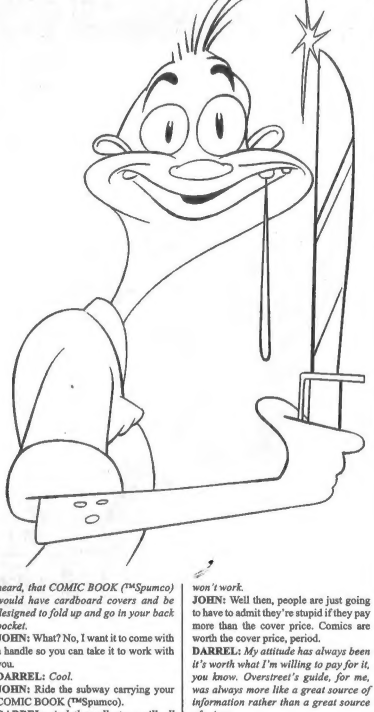
DARREL: *Right, and comic books did seem bigger when I was a kid.*

JOHN: Well, they were, they were bigger and they had more pages in them. We're thinking about that, too, more pages. And not slick paper. We want like really crummy newsprint, all the little chunks in it and everything. Big old color dots. This is a *real* comic book. It's not a wimpy superhero comic book. The old four-color process — I don't really know how they do it, but we just want it to look and feel like an old comic book.

DARREL: *And, obviously, we're not going to get a lot of —*

JOHN: And I'm not going to let Bill Wray paint the covers. *(Laughter.)* He can still be mad.

DARREL: *That was something else we heard, that COMIC BOOK (™Spumco) would have cardboard covers and be designed to fold up and go in your back pocket.*



JOHN: What? No, I want it to come with a handle so you can take it to work with you.

DARREL: *Cool.*

JOHN: Ride the subway carrying your COMIC BOOK (™Spumco).

DARREL: *And the collectors will all go, "How do I store this?" This is great.*

JOHN: We're going to make sure that it doesn't become collectible. We're going to write on it: If you ever pay more than the cover price for this you are an idiot!

DARREL: *That's great. It probably won't work.*

JOHN: Well then, people are just going to have to admit they're stupid if they pay more than the cover price. Comics are worth the cover price, period.

DARREL: *My attitude has always been it's worth what I'm willing to pay for it, you know. Overstreet's guide, for me, was always more like a great source of information rather than a great source of prices.*

JOHN: It's a criminal publication is what it is.

DARREL: *Anyway, where I was going; obviously we're not going to see a lot of guys in tights standing around grimacing and clenching their fists in*

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"We're thinking about JIMMY & G. LIQUOR, AMERICAN."

COMIC BOOK (™Spumco).

JOHN: Well, we might at some time, but we'll make fun of it, if we do.

DARREL: *What are the features?*

JOHN: Right now we're thinking about JIMMY THE HAPLESS BOY AND GEORGE LIQUOR, AMERICAN. You see Jimmy at the end of the credits on the original REN & STIMPY SHOW. The guy drooling, that's Jimmy. And George Liquor was kicked off THE REN & STIMPY SHOW.

DARREL: *A spin-off.*

JOHN: Mm-hm.

DARREL: *This character, from what we've seen, is basically the ugly American?*

JOHN: He's actually a really swell guy. I mean, he *is* an ugly American — but he's a wonderful human being, though. He doesn't bear any malice towards anybody, except for people who need haircuts. He has a big *heart*, a great big fat heart, and it's about to explode all of the time. And he *loves* his idiot nephew, Jimmy. He's always trying to teach Jimmy how to be a man. Takes him up to the wilderness, to *God's* country.

DARREL: *So, JIMMY AND GEORGE would be one feature?*

JOHN: Well, we're going to have a front story with just Jimmy by himself, or with whoever, where he stars in it, and we'll do some stories with George Liquor, and we'll do some stories with the two of them together. In fact, we're going to do a big Christmas issue, A REAL GOD-DAMNED CHRISTMAS where we learn the *real* meaning of an American Christmas. The kind of Christmas that God *wants* you to have. Christmas with *meaning*, with *pain* and *hardship*. This is George Liquor's view of Christmas. George Liquor thinks that Christmas today is wimpy, too commercialized, too easy. When he was a kid Christmas was really rough, and that's the way God intended it to be, so you could really really *value* it. So, he escapes from suburbia, he takes Jimmy up north to the wilderness to have a *manly* Christmas in nature, in God's rugged country.

DARREL: *The next thing I have on my list is HE-HOG, THE ATOMIC PIG. This is a new cartoon series that apparently is still tentative, too. How do things stand there?*

JOHN: It's in negotiations. Same old, you know, that's Hollywood, you negotiate forever.

DARREL: *And this was one of the ideas you wouldn't sell to Nickelodeon outright?*

JOHN: No, JIMMY THE HAPLESS BOY was what they really wanted to have.

DARREL: *Okay. What's HE-HOG? Is it going to be MIGHTY MOUSE or something entirely different?*

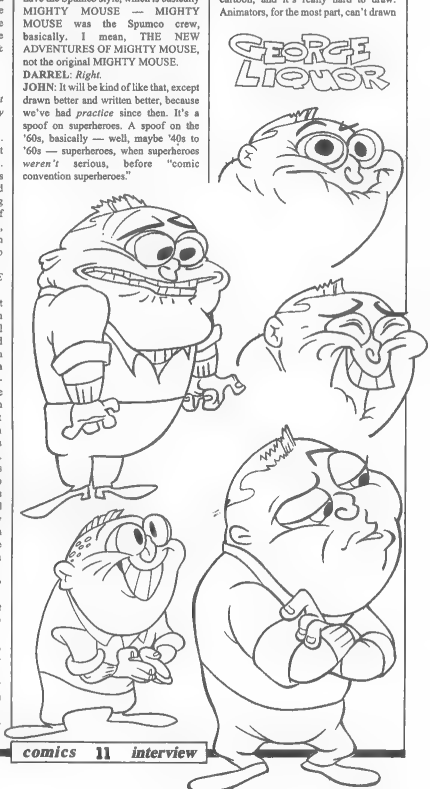
JOHN: Not *entirely* different. It will have the Spumco style, which is basically MIGHTY MOUSE — MIGHTY MOUSE was the Spumco crew, basically. I mean, THE NEW ADVENTURES OF MIGHTY MOUSE, not the original MIGHTY MOUSE.

DARREL: *Right.*

JOHN: It will be kind of like that, except drawn better and written better, because we've had *practice* since then. It's a spoof on superheroes. A spoof on the '60s, basically — well, maybe '40s to '60s — superheroes, when superheroes *weren't* serious, before "comic convention superheroes."

DARREL: *Great. The other thing I have in my notes is something called RIPPING FRIENDS, a theatrical animated feature. What's status on that?*

JOHN: It's on a back burner. THE RIPPING FRIENDS is a really manly cartoon, and it's really hard to draw. Animators, for the most part, can't drawn



"THE RIPPING FRIENDS — not superheroes; they

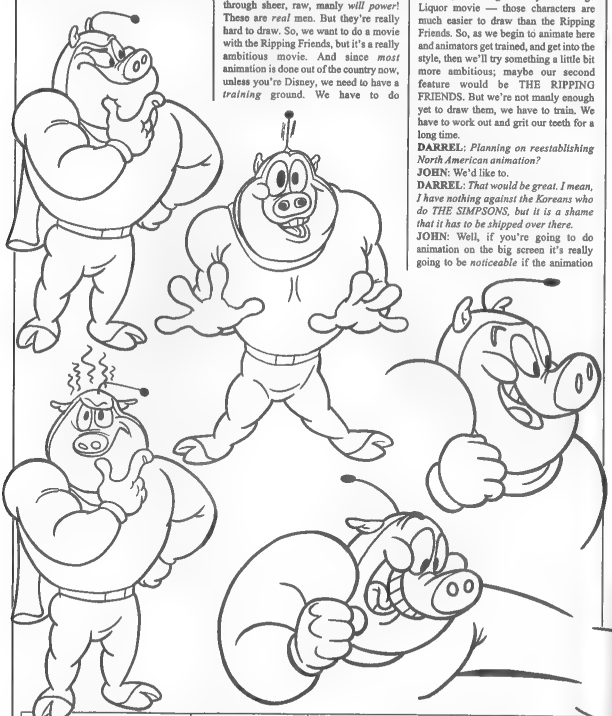
human anatomy, and even though it's really caricatured it's based on human anatomy. They're superheroes. This *totally* makes fun of the gritted teeth, clenched fists, clenched buttocks idea of superheroes. They're not actually superheroes, they don't have any super powers — they think superheroes are wimps because they have to *cheat* to win their battles. These guys win their battles through sheer, raw, manly *will power*! These are *real* men. But they're really hard to draw. So, we want to do a movie with the Ripping Friends, but it's a really ambitious movie. And since *most* animation is done out of the country now, unless you're Disney, we need to have a *training* ground. We have to do something that's not as *hard* as THE RIPPING FRIENDS *first*. So, we are talking to some of the major studios about doing *short* cartoons for the movie theaters, and doing a Jimmy and George Liquor movie — those characters are much easier to draw than the Ripping Friends. So, as we begin to animate here and animators get trained, and get into the style, then we'll try something a little bit more ambitious; maybe our second feature would be THE RIPPING FRIENDS. But we're not manly enough yet to draw them, we have to train. We have to work out and grit our teeth for a long time.

DARREL: *Planning on reestablishing North American animation?*

JOHN: We'd like to.

DARREL: *That would be great. I mean, I have nothing against the Koreans who do THE SIMPSONS, but it is a shame that it has to be shipped over there.*

JOHN: Well, if you're going to do animation on the big screen it's really going to be *noticeable* if the animation



PRODUCTION:	PRODUCTION #:	TEMP.	CHARACTER:
HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG	Series 2 HH	MAIN MODELS	HE-HOG

think superheroes are wimps because they have to cheat."

isn't great. You're going to be compared to Disney, and Disney animation is done here, it has an American *feel*. We want to do a *manly* American feel. You can't just send that overseas and expect it to come out.

Ren & Stimpy History

In 1979, while **John Kricfalusi** was working for an animation studio (Calico Creations) in Northridge, California, he created Ren and Stimpy. The characters started out as separate doodles. One was a psychotic chihuahua and the other a retarded-looking cat. The two characters had no relation to each other. **Kricfalusi** would do these funny little drawings to amuse his co-workers. Soon he was doing a creepy **Peter Lorre** voice and acting out insane scenes with the chihuahua character. At first, these characters had no names.

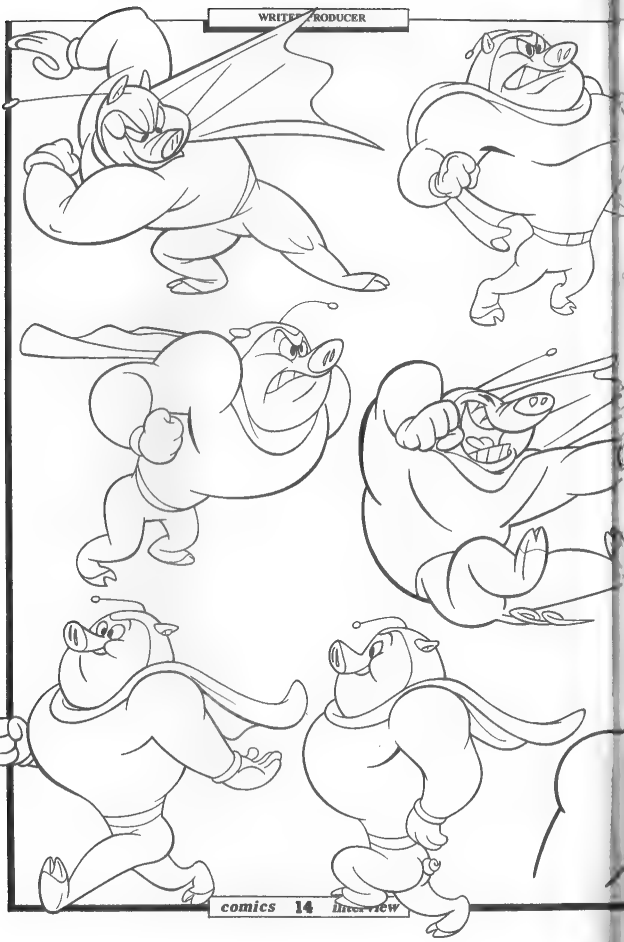
The name for the chihuahua was suggested by **Joel Fajnor**, an animator who worked at Calico with John. He was visiting **Kricfalusi** at his apartment in Van Nuys when he burst out laughing as he stared at the mailbox. **Kricfalusi** asked what he was laughing at and **Fajnor** pointed to the name on the mail box, "Ren Hoek." John explained that was his manager's name and **Fajnor** said, "Why don't you call your little chihuahua Ren Hoek?"

Around this time, **Kricfalusi** named the cat after an old college roommate, whose nickname was Stimpy Kadogan.

During the early years, **Kricfalusi** showed his rough sketches to many of his fellow cartoonists and discussed gag possibilities with them. These people include **Joel Fajnor, Lynne Naylor, Eddie Fitzgerald, Tom Minton, Felix Forte, Jim Gomez** and **Jeff John**, but nothing formal in the way of finished art or written material was produced. **Felix Forte** in particular, who helped **Kricfalusi** write a treatment for an animated feature using **Kricfalusi's** character "Mildman, the World's Most Powerful Homosexual," heavily influenced **Kricfalusi's** style of humor — not only for Ren and Stimpy but for everything else he has done and will do.

A couple of years later John K. and **Lynne Naylor** created the first presentation art with these characters. It was their intention to try to sell a show starring Ren & Stimpy. It would be years before they would get their chance to show it to anybody.

In 1987, after **Kricfalusi** directed THE NEW ADVENTURES OF MIGHTY MOUSE for **Ralph Bakshi, Kricfalusi** and **Naylor** put together presentations



"Kricfalusi sold REN & STIMPY to Nickelodeon

and a story bible for a number of their cartoon ideas, including one called "Your Gang." "Your Gang" featured a bunch of kids who lived in "Your Neighborhood." One of the kids, "Donny Chickenchild" was Ren and Stimpy's master. His stepfather was a character named "George Liquor." Most of the other kids were created as "window dressing" in order to make the cartoon more saleable. It didn't work. John K. took "Your Gang" and many other projects around to the networks to pitch. He acted out the stories and generally flailed and raved and jumped around the network offices and threw sweat all over the executives. All four networks turned the shows down.

In 1989, Nickelodeon announced that they were looking for original cartoon ideas. They wanted cartoons that were "creator-driven" rather than "product-driven" as most of the other TV cartoons were at the time. They promised creators creative freedom in return for complete ownership of the properties.

Kricfalusi sold REN & STIMPY to Nickelodeon and the network's gamble paid off — big time. Within a couple of months after the debut in August 1991, REN & STIMPY became the hottest new show not only on Nickelodeon, but on cable television itself. The show is the highest rated series (live-action or cartoon) ever on cable TV.

In September, 1992, after the show was established as a phenomenon amongst all age groups — not only children but adults as well — Nickelodeon took the show away from its creator and Spumco, the cartoon studio that produced the series and brought it to its peak of success. Just before the breakup, MTV President, **Tom Freston** told **Kricfalusi** that, "REN & STIMPY is the biggest thing to ever happen to MTV Networks, period. Maybe you should be doing work directly for MTV rather than Nickelodeon." The next week, MTV and Nickelodeon took over the show.

Fans were outraged. Celebrities supported John K. and Spumco.

Matt Groening, creator of THE SIMPSONS, said: "It's disturbing whenever the creator of something great gets the boot. It may be legal, but artistically it's outrageous . . ."

In an interview with VARIETY, **Groening** said he doesn't see: ". . . how they can continue the show without those madmen."

David Silverman, director on THE SIMPSONS, said: "It's like someone saying we like this 'Little Tramp' character, but let's get rid of that **Chaplin** guy."

John Hughes, film maker/producer, said: "Nobody knows what makes Ren & Stimpy work without John . . . he is the future of contemporary comedy . . . anybody doing comedy has much to learn from this guy."

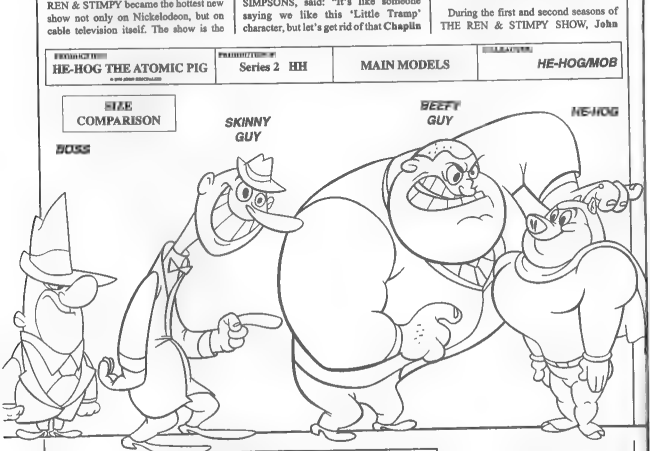
To this day, the reasons are unclear as to why the network took away their most successful creator-driven show from its most successful creator.

John Kricfalusi and Spumco continue to create new cartoon ideas and are currently in production on some theatrical shorts starring "Jimmy the Hapless Boy" and "George Liquor, American," (a character who gained infamy by being kicked off THE REN & STIMPY SHOW by MTV and Nickelodeon). They are developing features and television shows and are continuing their tradition of "cartoonist-made cartoons" that proved such a success for the original REN & STIMPY SHOW.

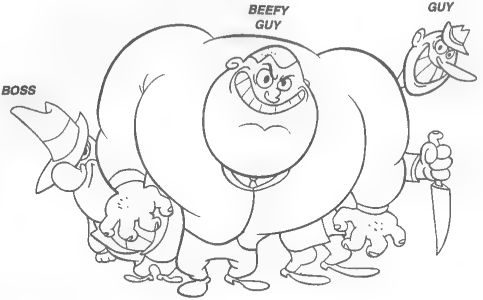
REN & STIMPY
Third Season Fact Sheet
November 19, 1993
Spumco-Written Episodes

During the first and second seasons of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, **John**

PRODUCT	PRODUCTION #	MAIN MODELS	ILLUSTRATOR
HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG	Series 2 HH		HE-HOG/MOB



and the network's gamble paid off — big time."



PRODUCTION:	PRODUCTION #:		CHARACTER:
HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG	Series 2 HH	MAIN MODELS	GENERIC MOBSTERS

Kricfalusi and his prolific writing staff wrote quite a few more stories than what have actually been produced so far. Many of these episodes were either originally rejected by Nickelodeon or are just left over. The third season of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW is the first season to be produced without the direct involvement of the show's creator, **John Kricfalusi**, and the original creative team of writers, directors and artists at the Spumco studio.

Spumco's key creative team consists of:
Jim Smith
Art Director, Storyboard
Vincent Waller
Writer, Storyboard, Director
Richard Parcel
Writer, Storyboard
Elinor Blake
Writer, Animator
John Kricfalusi
Creator, Producer, Director
Mike Fontanelli
Layout, Design
Eddie Fitzgerald
Storyboard, Layout
Henry Porch
Music Supervisor
Carbunkle Animation Studio

This key creative staff, plus Producer **Libby Simon** and much of the production staff have chosen to stay with Spumco despite offers from Nickelodeon for considerable raises because they believe in the original vision of the show (and the Spumco philosophy of cartoonist-made cartoons). These people and more did not want to be a part of the over-exploitive and compromised quality in the series' future.

Kricfalusi himself was offered an illusory position on the season, for more money than he was getting while he produced the series and brought it to success.

Nickelodeon, however, has decided to use many of the original team's leftover stories for their third season.

Here are some summaries of third season Ren and Stimpy episodes that were written by the original Spumco staff.

1. "Stimpy's Cartoon Show" (1/2 hr. episode)
Written by **Elinor Blake** and **John Kricfalusi**

This is John K.'s self parody. In this cartoon he and **Blake** poke fun at **Kricfalusi's** dictatorial directing style.

Synopsis

Stimpy is making a cartoon, "The funnest cartoon ever!" He wants Ren to help. Ren pooh-pooks cartoons saying they are "kids stuff." Then he breaks down crying and admits that he does want to work on the cartoon but has a terrible confession to make. He can't draw! Stimpy comforts him as if he were crippled, "It's like that is it?"

Stimpy then offers Ren the perfect job for someone in the cartoon business who is "drawing deficient," "You can write!"

After Ren admits he can't even write, nor do anything even remotely creative, Stimpy says, "You can be the Producer!"

Stimpy explains a producer's duties. "The Producer's job is to tell the artist what to do, then make him change it a million times, and then when its finished, he takes all the credit for it!" Ren decides this is the perfect job for him, "I'll do it!"

Ren puts on his "Producer's Helmet" and supervises the grueling work that Stimpy performs.

When the cartoon is finished the boys take it to show the great "Raymond Spum," founder of animated cartoons and Spumco's namesake. (Since Nickelodeon took over THE REN & STIMPY SHOW they changed Ray Spum's name to "Wilber Cobb," presumably a jab at newly appointed

"Will McRobb: 'Maybe you thought we had a

REN AND STIMPY head writer Will McRobb.)

This story was originally intended as a parody of the working situation between Nickelodeon and Spumco. The story was about the kind of network interference the Spumco creative staff encountered as they tried to make their cartoons funny. Stimpy was in the role of the creative cartoonists and Ren took the role of the network executive who would throw out all of the creator's best work and make him redo everything. When this story was first submitted to Nickelodeon on December 16, 1991, Nickelodeon representative **Will McRobb** sent this response:

"Maybe you thought we had a sense of humor about ourselves — we don't. All the jokes that come at the expense of the producer have to go. Is there some other job for Ren that doesn't impugn Nickelodeon executives?"

John K. then called Nickelodeon and convinced **Will McRobb** that the cartoon poked fun at **Kricfalusi**, not the Nickelodeon execs. **Will McRobb** sent back this reply:

"STIMPY'S CARTOON: After convincing Vanessa that you were poking fun at yourself, not at her, with all the producer jokes, she reconsidered. Go ahead with what you've outlined. Green light."

Kricfalusi combined his own role as producer/director with the network executive's role in charge of unnecessary changes and created a satire about the artist's creative plight in the animation industry.

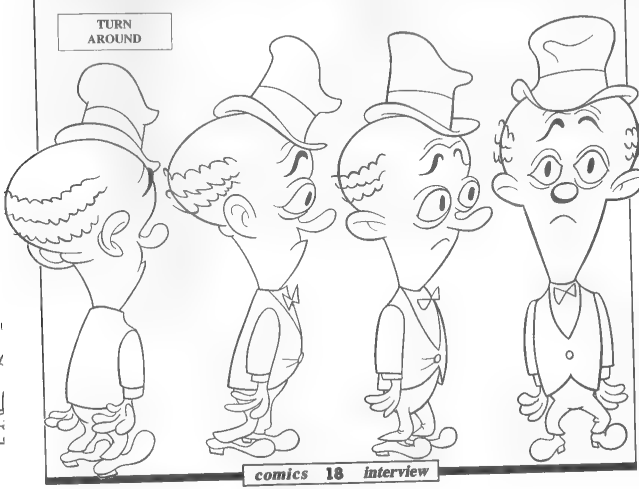
The finished cartoon plays almost exactly like the Spumco script (actually an outline) except for one joke that doesn't appear in the original story. The new "creative director" in charge of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW has been known for taking cross-country college tours and many vacations during the production season, while the cartoonists carry the load of the show back in LA. An article written by **Bob Langford** on a **Camp** promo tour stated: ". . . his network didn't know a thing about his promotional tour. The folks at Nick didn't sound at all thrilled when they were told. They want **Camp** back in LA drawing, not in Chapel Hill preaching to the choir."

Marty Von Ruden went on to say: "I'm not happy about it personally. I had some idea that he was going to do it. I asked him not to do it."

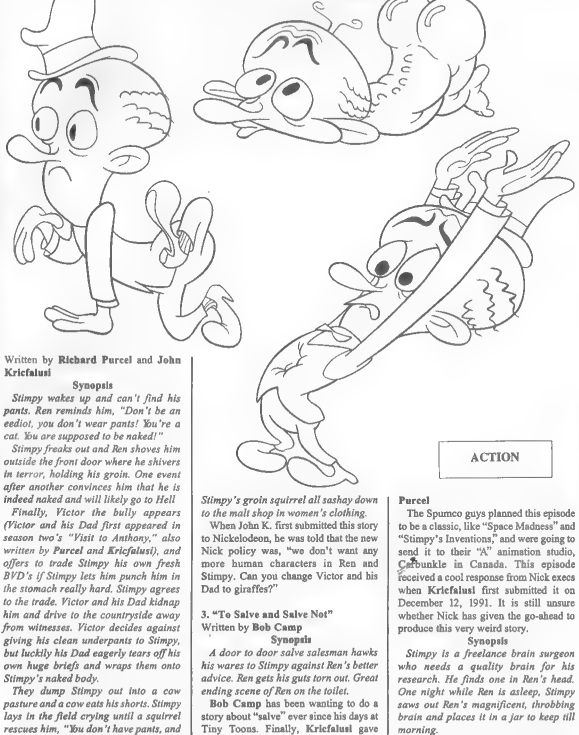
In one scene of Stimpy's Cartoon Show, the Nickelodeon artists drew their revenge. Ren plans the production schedule for Stimpy's cartoon. He allows 3 weeks of the year for the production and the rest of the year he assigns to "Producer Vacation." A very funny "in-joke."

2. No Pants Today (Originally titled "The Dirty Little Naked Boy")

PRODUCTION:	PRODUCTION #:		CHARACTER:
HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG	Series 2 HH	MAIN MODELS	*MILD MANNERED MAN*



sense of humor about ourselves — we don't.'"



ACTION

Written by **Richard Purcell** and **John Kricfalusi**

Synopsis

Stimpy wakes up and can't find his pants. Ren reminds him, "Don't be an eediot, you don't wear pants! You're a cat. You are supposed to be naked!"

Stimpy freaks out and Ren shoves him outside the front door where he shivers in terror, holding his groin. One event after another convinces him that he is indeed naked and will likely go to Hell

Finally, Victor the bully appears (Victor and his Dad first appeared in season two's "Visit to Anthony," also written by **Purcel** *and* **Kricfalusi***), and offers to trade Stimpy his own fresh BYD's if Stimpy lets him punch him in the stomach really hard. Stimpy agrees to the trade. Victor and his Dad kidnap him and drive to the countryside away from witnesses. Victor decides against giving his clean underpants to Stimpy, but luckily his Dad eagerly tears off his own huge briefs and wraps them onto Stimpy's naked body.*

They dump Stimpy out into a cow pasture and a cow eats his shorts. Stimpy lays in the field crying until a squirrel rescues him, "You don't have pants, and I don't have a home! Let's be partners!" The squirrel leaps onto Stimpy's private area and covers his nakedity. In the happy ending, Ren and Stimpy and Stimpy's groin squirrel all sashay down to the mall shop in women's clothing.

When John K. first submitted this story to Nickelodeon, he was told that the new Nick policy was, "we don't want any more human characters in Ren and Stimpy. Can you change Victor and his Dad to giraffes?"

3. "To Salve and Salve Not"
Written by **Bob Camp**

Synopsis

A door to door salve salesman hawks his wares to Stimpy against Ren's better advice. Ren gets his guts torn out. Great ending scene of Ren on the toilet.

Bob Camp has been wanting to do a story about "salve" ever since his days at Tiny Toons. Finally, **Kricfalusi** gave **Camp** his chance.

4. "Ren's Brain"
Written by **John Kricfalusi** and **Richard Purcel**

The Spumco guys planned this episode to be a classic, like "Space Madness" and "Stimpy's Inventions," and were going to send it to their "A" animation studio, Carbunkle in Canada. This episode received a cool response from Nick execs when **Kricfalusi** first submitted it on December 12, 1991. It is still unsure whether Nick has given the go-ahead to produce this very weird story.

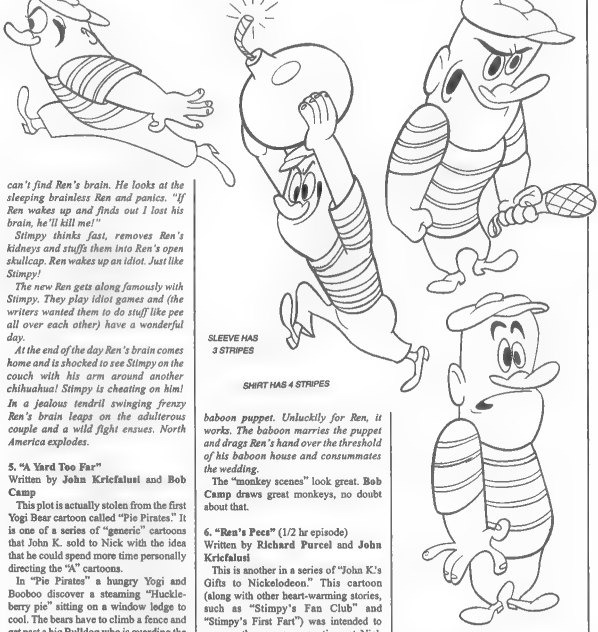
Synopsis

Stimpy is a freelance brain surgeon who needs a quality brain for his research. He finds one in Ren's head. One night while Ren is asleep, Stimpy saws out Ren's magnificent, throbbing brain and places it in a jar to keep till morning.

The next day Ren's brain wakes up, none the wiser. He goes to work (marching on his brain tendrils) feeling a little funny. When Stimpy wakes up, he

"Lummox: large human male, watches football, drinks

PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION #:		CHARACTER:
HE-HOG / HE ATOMIC PIG	Series 2 HH	MAIN MODELS	LITTLE GUY



can't find Ren's brain. He looks at the sleeping brainless Ren and panics. "If Ren wakes up and finds out I lost his brain, he'll kill me!"

Stimpy thinks fast, removes Ren's kidneys and stuffs them into Ren's open skullcap. Ren wakes up an idiot. Just like Stimpy!

The new Ren gets along famously with Stimpy. They play idiot games and (the writers wanted them to do stuff like pee all over each other) have a wonderful day.

At the end of the day Ren's brain comes home and is shocked to see Stimpy on the couch with his arm around another chihuahua! Stimpy is cheating on him!

In a jealous tendril swinging frenzy Ren's brain leaps on the adulterous couple and a wild fight ensues. North America explodes.

5. "A Yard Too Far"
Written by **John Kricfalusi** and **Bob Camp**

This plot is actually stolen from the first Yogi Bear cartoon called "Pie Pirates." It is one of a series of "generic" cartoons that John K. sold to Nick with the idea that he could spend more time personally directing the "A" cartoons.

In "Pie Pirates" a hungry Yogi and Booboo discover a steaming "Huckleberry pie" sitting on a window ledge to cool. The bears have to climb a fence and get past a big Bulldog who is guarding the yard.

Synopsis

Replace the bears with Ren and Stimpy: the pie with a steaming plate of hog jowls and the bulldog with a ferocious baboon and you have "A Yard Too Far."

Great ending. Ren tries to lure the baboon away from the jowls with a sexy baboon puppet. Unluckily for Ren, it works. The baboon marries the puppet and drags Ren's hand over the threshold of his baboon house and consummates the wedding.

The "monkey scenes" look great. **Bob Camp** draws great monkeys, no doubt about that.

6. "Ren's Pecs" (1/2 hr episode)
Written by Richard Purcel and **John Kricfalusi**

This is another in a series of "John K.'s Gifts to Nickelodeon." This cartoon (along with other heart-warming stories, such as "Stimpy's Fan Club" and "Stimpy's First Fart") was intended to appease the women executives at Nick who were not thrilled with the gross and aggressive nature of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW.

Synopsis

This is a tearjerking tale of Stimpy's love for his one and only lifelong male companion, Ren Hoek. Ren gets sand kicked in his face and wishes he had big pectoral muscles so he could defend himself. Charles Atlas shows up sporting a magnificent set of pecs and tells Ren about his own miracle. Through the wonders of modern surgery, Charles had his butt fat removed and inserted into his chest. Unfortunately, Ren doesn't have any butt fat. Stimpy in a selfless gesture, offers his own handsome butt to Ren.

Doctors sew Stimpy's butt into Ren's

beer, interrupting this pattern only for mating rituals."

chest and Ren becomes a magnificent specimen of male beauty.

Stimpy, without his butt fat, hobbles around with a cane and his butt skin dragging along the floor. Although permanently disfigured, he is happy for Ren. Ren becomes popular; he is the poster boy for beach calendars and he is soon offered a Hollywood contract. He dumps Stimpy, moves to Hollywood and has whirlwind affairs with all the Hollywood starlets, while Stimpy stays at home pining for Ren and slowly wasting away.

Eventually Ren's chest betrays him to his fiancee and he is back home with his beloved companion and he realizes that his first relationship was a real *one.*

7. "Lair of the Lummox" (1/2 hr episode)
Written by **Bob Camp, Jim Smith** and **John Kricfalusi**

This story is one of the "lost episodes" from the second season. The storyboard was completed at Spumco long before the Nickelodeon takeover and was supposed to air (according to Nickelodeon sources) before January, 1993. The Nick execs hated this episode because it was too gross and too male. However, this was one of **Bob Camp's** favorite episodes, so hopefully he will get it into the third season production cycle.

Synopsis

In this sequel to "Untamed World," renowned nature show hosts, Marlin Hoek, and his partner Stimpy trail the elusive Lummox in the wilds of Ignoramia.

A "Lummox" is a large human male who spends his time watching football, drinking beer and eating potato chips, interrupting this pattern only for periodic mating rituals. This cartoon is a Ren & Stimpy gross-fest. Dirty underwear, nose-picking and burning farts galore! Pray for it.

8. "Eat My Cookies"
From a premise by **Richard Purcel**

Synopsis

Ren and Stimpy are girl scouts. They sell hairball-filled cookies door to door.

9. "All Sluggards Day"
From an idea by **Bob Camp,** premise by **Richard Purcel**

Synopsis

A studio "in-joke." **Camp** conceived this idea based upon the work habits of one of his fellow employees. The title of this episode will probably be changed to protect the innocent.

10. "Fishing Trip"
Premise by **Richard Purcel** and **John Kricfalusi**

Synopsis

Ren and Stimpy go fishing for "foul-mouthed bass." One particularly foul-mouth bass swears at the hapless duo all through the cartoon. **Purcel** *invented some very funny broadcastable epithets.*

11. "Jiminy Lummox"
Premise by **Bob Camp**

Synopsis

Stimpy realizes that Ren doesn't have a conscience and loans him his own; "Jiminy Lummox." The huge oaf stands atop Ren's shoulder and punishes him whenever he does wrong.

Likely in answer to John K.'s "Stimpy Cartoon Show." **Camp** pokes fun at himself in his own good-natured self-parody.

12. "Over The Hill"
Premise by **Bob Camp**

Synopsis

Geezer jokes starring Ren and Stimpy.

Future Stories

There are at least 20 more Ren and Stimpy stories that were written by the original crew at Spumco during the first two seasons of the show. Some were potential classics, like "Ren's Bad Habits" and "Onward and Upward." It remains to be seen whether Nickelodeon will continue to use old stories or whether they will begin to chart a new direction for the series.

Why is Ren & Stimpy Late?
Third Season, 3 Months Late

For the first two consecutive seasons of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, while Spumco was producing the series, the first Ren and Stimpy episodes premiered on schedule in mid-August. The third season now being produced by Nickelodeon premiered on Saturday, November 20, 1993, *more than three months later* than Spumco delivered their seasons. By the tenth week of the season, only four new half hours appeared.

Nick Promises

Earlier in 1993, Nickelodeon executives and artists seemed to be aware that they would be later than the first two seasons, but were conservative in their estimates.

Vanessa Coffey

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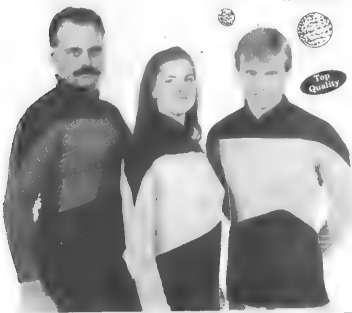

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"Cartoons are hard to do, that's it."

In an article in CABLEVISION magazine, **Vanessa Coffey** promises that third season episodes will premiere in September, only one month behind schedule. The article states:

"Although **Coffey** states that production for the 13 episodes of the third season is on schedule and will begin airing in September, **Wray** expresses some doubt."

Bill Wray

In the same article, Nickelodeon artist **Bill Wray** says: "All that quality takes time, but you can't explain that to a major corporation that wants product. It's just not a legitimate concern."

In an interview in COMICS INTERVIEW, cover captioned "The Real Story," **Wray** acknowledges that they are going to be late.

". . . We'll probably be a little late at times. We just won't have the time to give the physical care to the cartoons that John did. Under the restrictions of time, we're going to try to produce cartoons as good as we can."

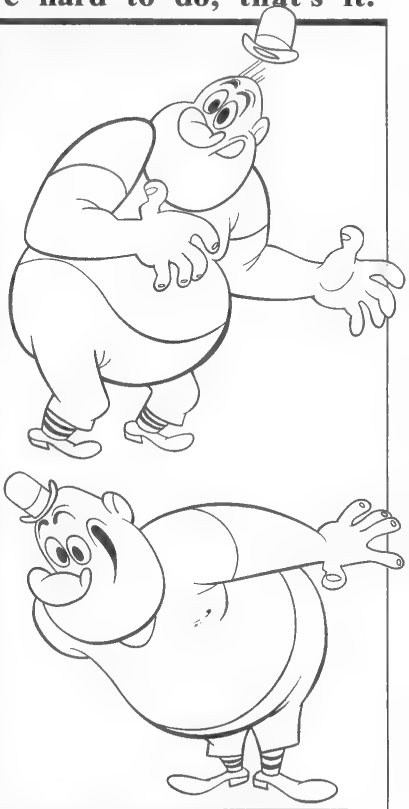
In CABLEVISION Magazine dated May of 1993, he explains: "It almost broke us when a lot of the Spumco people didn't go over . . . our number one problem is finding talent. A lot of people say they don't want to work here because it's a traitor studio, and that's a difficult hurdle to overcome."

Bob Camp

At the Atlanta comic book convention in July of '93, Nickelodeon's creative director, **Bob Camp**, explained why THE REN & STIMPY SHOW has such sporadic delivery.

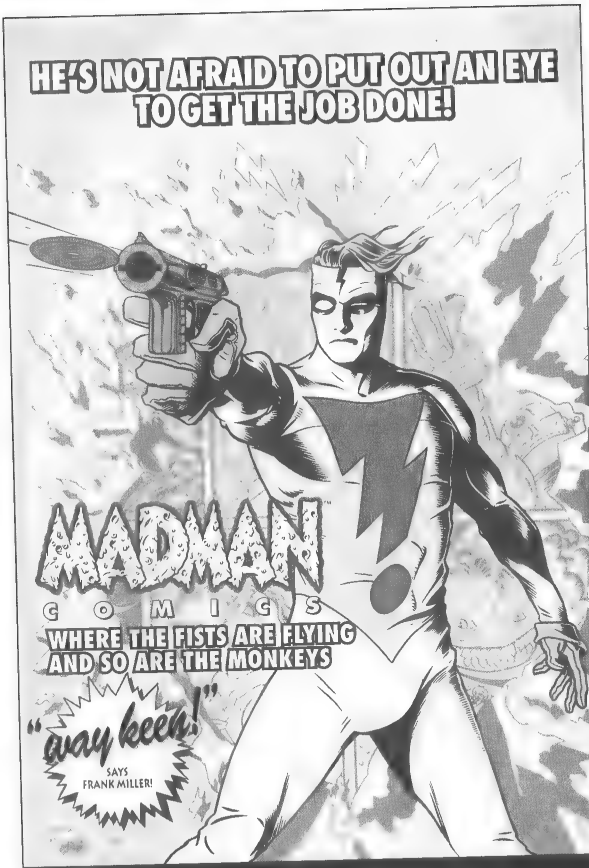
"Cartoons are hard to do, that's it. And, uh, REN & STIMPY is the hardest cartoon to do. In the whole world. And, uh, there are so very few people that can draw this stuff. There's really very few people that can draw these characters. We look at hundreds of portfolios and we very seldom find somebody who can hack the level of the show. That's not bragging, it's just the truth. And so, they're, they're hard to produce, we don't have enough money, and we don't really get enough time to begin with, so they come out when they come out."

Regardless of the fact that Nickelodeon's people seemed aware that they were going to be late, they presented a very different face to the press just prior



PRODUCTION:	PRODUCTION #:		CHARACTER:
HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG	Series 2 HH	MAIN MODELS	DOPEY

© 1993 JOHN KRICFALUSI


HE'S NOT AFRAID TO PUT OUT AN EYE TO GET THE JOB DONE!
MADMAN
COMICS
WHERE THE FISTS ARE FLYING AND SO ARE THE MONKEYS
"way keen!"
SAYS FRANK MILLER!
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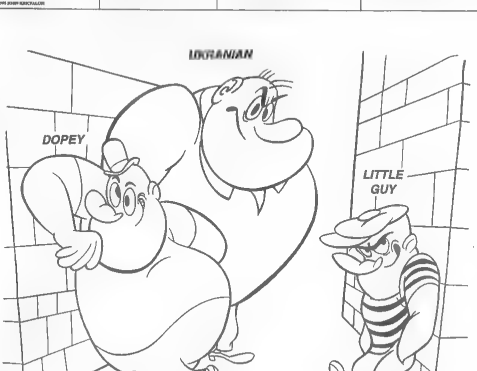
"Out of 13 half-hour episodes for '92, Nick has aired 11."

PRODUCTION:			CHARACTER:
HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG	Series 2 HH	MAIN MODELS	STREET THUGS



SIZE COMPARISON

to the third season premiere.

In Los Angeles' DAILY NEWS (November 20, 1993), journalist **Ray Richmond** printed boasts of Nickelodeon's supposed new production prowess.

"Coffey also maintains that it's nice to finally be meeting some deadlines.

"'We learned a lot from our experience with **John Kricfalusi** . . . Things are running a lot smoother now.' Coffey said."

Bob Camp, in a feature for the LOS ANGELES TIMES (October 17, 1993), said: "We have a lot more efficient studio . . . Last year we were really struggling. Everything had to go through John."

Second Season Incomplete

While Nickelodeon boasted of their efficient new studio and the third season of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, they never mentioned that the second season was never even finished. Nickelodeon has not, to date, completed airing the second season episodes. Out of 13 half-hour episodes that were in production at Spumco for the 1992 season, Nickelodeon has aired only 11.

In an article from THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER on October 12, 1992, **Marty Von Ruden** (Nick's VP of publicity) states that: ". . . all 13 new episodes will air by January."

In a NEW YORK TIMES article dated October 5, 1992, **Vanessa Coffey** is quoted as saying, "All 13 new episodes of Ren & Stimpy will air by January."

After promising that all 13 second season episodes would air by January, 1993, the 11th episode ("The Royal Canadian Kilted Yaksman") aired in July.

On Thursday, June 10, 1993, Nickelodeon threw a "wrap" party to celebrate the completion of the second season of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW. Despite claims that all 13 episodes would air by January, 1993, only 11 episodes had aired up to date of the wrap party. Nickelodeon had a "wrap" party for a season that to this day never "wrapped."

The Spumco Philosophy

The Spumco cartoon studio that produced the original REN & STIMPY SHOW and brought it fame, is the only Hollywood cartoon studio that is actually run by and for cartoonists. Spumco brought back the production system that produced the classic American cartoons of the 1930s to the 1950s. When REN & STIMPY was totally produced by Spumco, the creative direction was governed by **John Kricfalusi** and his creative artists. They not only *drew* the cartoons, they also *wrote and directed* them. This was a complete innovation for modern studio. Nickelodeon is using a modified version of the system that it inherited from Spumco; however, evidence that the production control has shifted toward the Saturday Morning Cartoon System is apparent in the credits.

When the cartoons were under Spumco's control, the artists had the first and largest credits. The first credit at the end of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW was a card that read "Produced by **John Kricfalusi, Jim Smith** and **Bob Camp**." **Kricfalusi**, who approved the credits, felt that these three people (all cartoonists) were the ones most responsible for the creative input of the show and credited them appropriately.

"Spumco's cartoonists long for the day the industry

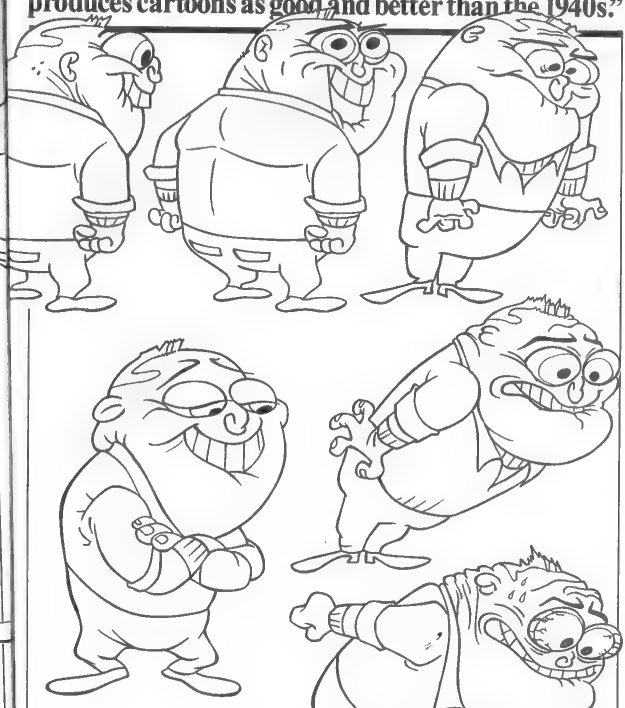
When Nickelodeon took over the show, they lured **Bob Camp** away on the pretense he would have the same responsibilities that his mentor, **John Kricfalusi**, originally had. After **Camp** took the job, Nickelodeon removed his producer's credit (as well as **Jim Smith's**) and created a new title for him, "creative director." The "Producer" credit went to **Jim Ballantine** who was formerly a "production manager" for Spumco. **Ballantine** was not involved creatively on the original series, and now has a larger and more important title in the animation community than does **Bob Camp**. "Supervising producer" credits went to **Mary Harrington** and **Roy Smith**, who had nothing to do with producing second season episodes. Nickelodeon has also gone back to earlier episodes of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW and changed the credits. They have awarded the largest writer credit to a Nickelodeon staff employee who is not an artist and, in fact, is not even a writer on the series. **Will McRobb** is the only person on the new REN & STIMPY to receive a single-card writer's credit in the series' whole two-and-a-half year history. One of Spumco's biggest creative ideals is that "only cartoonists should write cartoons." **Camp** himself has stated this ideal in many interviews. He now (as well as the other writers) has less credit for writing than does a Nickelodeon non-cartoonist who in actuality was not even a writer on the second season of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW.

Why REN & STIMPY succeeded and what it meant to animation's future

The success of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW is due mainly to the fact that for the first time in 30 years cartoonists had control back of the medium they created. Cartoonists wrote REN & STIMPY. They made "cartoony" cartoons that used funny drawings rather than expository scripts to tell the stories. It worked. John K. has spent his whole professional life trying to wrest creative controls back for the cartoonists and their artform. He has given breaks to cartoonists such as **Bob Camp** and many others that no other animation studio ever would. At the other animation studios, the writers and executives are in charge of the creative process. At Spumco, the cartoonists are in charge. Spumco will continue to make cartoonist-driven cartoons and will continue to seek out the creative **Jim Smiths, Vincent Wallers and Bob Camps** of the future.

Spumco hopes that its example and its success will encourage other animation studios to let cartoonists create cartoons. Already the idea seems to be catching on at various cartoon studios. Hanna-

produces cartoons as good and better than the 1940s."



Barbera are wetting their feet with the idea with TWO STUPID DOGS, created by **Donovan Cook**. Disney is producing a series of cartoons with **Bill Kopp**, creator of SHNOOKUMS AND MEAT. This series features work from Spumco alumni, **Lynne Naylor, Eddie Fitzgerald** and **Charlie Bean**. The Spumco cartoonists long to see the day when the industry returns to its roots and produces cartoons that are as good and better than the American golden age of cartoons in the 1940s. This golden age was due to creative geniuses, like **Walt Disney, Bob Clampett, Chuck Jones** and **Tex Avery** — all of them cartoonists. □

"In the early 1970s I did a research paper on comics.

JEFF ROVIN

Photo: Lou Mougin

I first met Jeff Rovin in the smoke-laden pro suite at the Dallas Fantasy Fair. It was in a three-way conversation between or among Jeff, James Vance (KINGS IN DISGUISE) and myself, and Jeff was telling some fascinating anecdotes about publisher/editor James Warren — some of which are presented in this interview. Jeff came off as a very friendly and intelligent guy, and I figured that, sometime, he'd be a good subject for a COMICS INTERVIEW grilling.

I was kind of hazy on his professional background then, but, since then, I've discovered his history as a writer and editor for Warren, Skywald, and Atlas, his authorship of a batch of books dealing with popular culture (including THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SUPER-HEROES), and his ongoing career as a celebrity interviewer. His "Babylon" books (on TV, country music, and sports) have been fun reads, and his biography of TV's Batman, Adam West, will probably find its way to a lot of fan libraries.

And yes, he is a friendly and intelligent guy. So let's get to the interview . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *I'm sitting here with Jeff Rovin at the Dallas Fantasy Fair, and we're going to talk with Jeff about his long career in comics and in other media. Jeff, your origin story! What can you tell me about what got you into this life of sin, doing comic books and trivia*

"To Sleepy Hollow . . . Returned" (art: Leo Summers) is but one of the many stories Jeff wrote for Jim Warren's company during his stay.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jeff Rovin
Born: 5 November '51 — Brooklyn, NY
Credits: Editorial work for Warren, Atlas, and Skywald in the 1970s; writer for Atlas (PHOENIX #1 and THRILLING ADVENTURE STORIES) and various stories for Warren's CREEPY and EERIE; writer of numerous books, including THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SUPER-HEROES, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SUPER VILLAINS, TV BABYLON 1 and 2, COUNTRY MUSIC BABYLON, THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ELVIS, bios of Joan Collins, Julio Iglesias, Adam West, etc., plus many more.
Favorite Scandal: The death of George Reeves (in TV BABYLON)
Favorite Interview Subject: Charlton Heston, because it developed into a friendship of 22 years; but also Sean Connery, Roger Moore, and Natalie Wood
Favorite Color: The color behind Gorgo on the cover of FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND #11

I was trying to legitimize them for academia."

books and such?

JEFF ROVIN: Well, I was going to NYU in the early 1970s and I did a research paper on comic books. I had always read them and, like everyone else at the time, was trying to *legitimize* them in the halls of academia. I went up to interview **Sol Brodsky,** who had just started Skywald with **Israel Waldman** —

LOU: *Around 1970 or so?*

JEFF: This was the end of '71, the fall of '71. And we really hit it off. He asked me — he was overworked, it was just really him — he asked me if I wanted to handle his letters pages and proofread. Sure! He was getting work by some interesting *young* writers like **Marv Wolfman,** and **Ernie Colon** was doing some art for him, and **Jeff Jones** was doing covers, and **Pablo Marcos** was doing some art. And **Bill Everett!** He got **Bill Everett** to do some things.

LOU: *For his horror comics?*

JEFF: Exactly.

LOU: *And Jack Katz.*

JEFF: Right. I didn't have much to do with THE HEAP or his Westerns or jungle comics, just the black-and-whites, PSYCHO, NIGHTMARE, and a science-fiction title called ODYSSEY that he never published.

LOU: *Didn't they also do that HELLRIDER thing?*

JEFF: HELLRIDER lasted two issues, by **Gary Friedrich.**

LOU: *And Dick Ayers.*

JEFF: And **Syd Shores** did some demonic inking on that. That was, you know, *supposed* to be hip. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Kind of like a tryout for GHOST RIDER.*

JEFF: GHOST RIDER! Hear that, folks — buy this! *(Laughter.)* But it was an interesting experiment. Sol wanted to do black-and-whites differently than Warren was doing at the time, largely because Warren pretty much dominated that field, but yet there was still room for new titles. Then in February of '72 I went to talk with **Carmine Infantino,** who was publishing DC Comics, to see if I could work there. You know, there wasn't much you could learn at Skywald. So, as it happened, **Dorothy Woolfolk,** who was editing LOIS LANE and the romance comics, needed an assistant, so I started proofreading and doing the letters pages for her, and doing advice to the lovelorn. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *What was your best advice to the lovelorn?*

JEFF: Oh, there was some really *mean* advice! Two short girls had written in to the column; they were complaining about their love lives, and the comment was, "Well, you won't have a love life because you're just a pair of shorts." *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Was this "Chat with Chuck" or something?*

Splash panel from Seaboard's PHOENIX #1 (1975). Dick Giordano's brother-in-law, Sal Amendola, provided the art for Jeff's story.

THE DAMAGE TO SECTOR C HAS BEEN SEVERE! TANKS OF LIQUID OXYGEN EXPLODE, CRIPPLING THRESHOLD BEYOND REPAIR!
BUT WITH EVERY DEATH THERE IS A BIRTH, AND FROM THE SPACE STATION'S DEMISE IS BORN AN INCREDIBLE NEW CHAPTER IN MAN'S HISTORY!
THE PHOENIX
"FROM THE ASHES"
SCRIPT & EDITING: JEFF ROVIN
ART: SAL AMENDOLA

PHOENIX © 1975 Seaboard Periodicals, Inc.

"Kubert needed an assistant, so I jumped between

JEFF: No, this was "Mark on the Man's Side," and it was intended . . . Dorothy wanted it to be *incendiary* to get people to write. But, you know, it was a farce. The LOIS LANE comics, which were *supposed* to be liberated, still always ended up with Superman saving her.

LOU: *Right.*

JEFF: There was no way around that. Then **Joe Orlando** needed an assistant. He was doing SWAMP THING and the horror titles, so I went over to work for him, and I wrote my first story for him.

LOU: *Which one was that?*

JEFF: It was DARK MANSION. I forget the story; it was a horror story about an evil sheriff who was actually a demon, came to help a houseful of people but really killed them.

LOU: *Sounds like Texas.*

JEFF: Yes, pretty much. *(Laughter.)* Then **Joe Kubert** needed an assistant, so I jumped between **Kubert** and **Orlando.** You just couldn't ask for *better* tutoring than that! That was the time when **Kubert** was bringing in all these young artists to do the **Edgar Rice Burroughs** stuff. **Chaykin** was there. And **Orlando** was working with **Bernie Wrightson** and **Len Wein.** It was an interesting time.

LOU: *That was your second generation of DC people.*

JEFF: Absolutely, absolutely true. *But,* you still had the *first* generation, **Murphy Anderson** and **Gil Kane** and, of course, **Julie Schwartz.**

LOU: *And Denny and Neal, who were kind of like first-and-a-half generation.*

JEFF: Right, **Denny O'Neil** had already been there and was established, and **Neal Adams** was still doing BATMAN and DETECTIVE. So, it was *really* an exciting time! Even though the sales weren't all that great, they were getting a lot of attention, SGT. ROCK and those things.

LOU: *That was a prime period for SGT. ROCK.*

JEFF: Absolutely!

LOU: All *the war titles, they were great.*

JEFF: Yes.

LOU: *Russ Heath, John Severin, Ken Barr —*

JEFF: Sam Glanzman! What was great was whenever the work would come in — **Sam Glanzman** would do these *wonderful* thumbnail sketches that were *so* detailed, it was just exciting to see those.

LOU: *You couldn't believe this was the same guy that was doing KONA, MONARCH OF MONSTER ISLE, for Dell.*

JEFF: Exactly! But, you know — Dell, of course, wasn't paying what DC was — with guys like Sam or **Jack Sparling** you got what you paid for. When Jack wanted to he could really do terrific wash work in black and white, really well composed. And then there were changes at DC. Joe stopped coming in every day, and . . . I don't know.

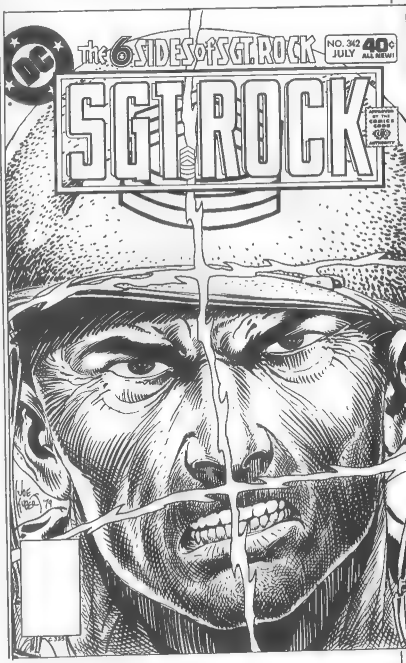
LOU: *Along about the mid '70s?*

JEFF: '73, late in the spring. So, at that point I left DC and worked in advertising for a little while. All of this was while still going to school. Incredibly exhausting. But then I went up to Warren in the end of '73 and **Jim Warren** hired me to run the Captain Company.

LOU: *That was their mail order business?*

JEFF: That's right. And we remade that from top to bottom, did away with those

Two examples of Joe Kubert's SGT. ROCK artwork — late '70s.



him and Orlando. You couldn't ask for better tutoring."

crummy little box ads, had flashier *bigger* dumb ads. *(Laughter.)* But they were so fun! It was great. I discovered a box full of out-of-print FMs so we put them in the magazine for $10 and $20 and they sold!

LOU: *FAMOUS MONSTERS.*

JEFF: Right. And that was a time, again, when Bernie had moved over to Warren and was doing that *incredible* black-and-white stuff, and **Reed Crandall** was still there —

LOU: *Doug Moench was starting to work there.*

JEFF: Yes, he was. He had been there, actually, a little while. And **Bill Dubay** was running the editorial side, and I became his editorial assistant as well as running Captain Company. Bill never got a fair shake. I don't think *anybody* who is in that *kind* of position, where you have to interface between management and the creative side, *ever* gets a fair shake — **Jim Shooter** is another example — because anything you do is going to be wrong to someone. But **Bill Dubay** in particular I think deserves a lot of credit, which he has *never* gotten, for elevating the illustrative side of comics to what they are today. He brought in the Spanish artists, which a *lot* of people didn't like, but it really changed the way comics *looked*. It also changed the international marketing of comics, because Warren was making money selling that stuff overseas, and buying stuff that was drawn overseas. So that really was the kind of a start of a new era.

LOU: *This was when they found out they didn't just have to hire new people from in-country.*

JEFF: That's right. Well, of course, they'd done that a little bit at DC with the Philippines, but this was the first time that was done on that kind of a large scale, with a Spanish illustration house and big-money commitments. And eventually the magazines were done almost *entirely* by the Spanish artists. **Rich Corben** started at the time. *His* stuff would come in. He was doing those color separations, which of course were done entirely in gray pencil, so they would come in and you would just see blobs of gray on these transparencies. "What the hell *is* this?" And then you would send it to the printer and it would come back these *gorgeous* colors. He would visualize all that and do it in gray tones! And, of course, we worked with **Will Eisner**, because that was when THE SPIRIT started.

LOU: *How did that come about? Was Warren a fantastic SPIRIT fan or what?*

JEFF: No, I think Jim at that time was looking to expand into other areas. He started 1984/1994 at the time.

LOU: *Right, later on.*

JEFF: It was not *that* much later than THE SPIRIT, and 1984/1994 came about then because he had wanted to do — it was originally going to be called YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW — he wanted to do a science-fiction magazine. Jim felt that science fiction was going to come back. This was, mind you, two or three years before STAR WARS. And he had a *humor* magazine that not too many people know about.

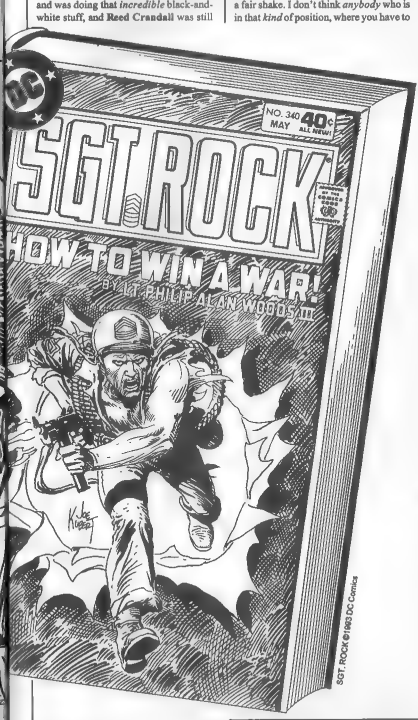
LOU: *HELP?*

JEFF: No, HELP was an older title that **Kurtzman** had done.

LOU: *Yeah.*

JEFF: And, incidentally, so had **John Cleese** and **Terry Gilliam.**

LOU: *Woody Allen.*



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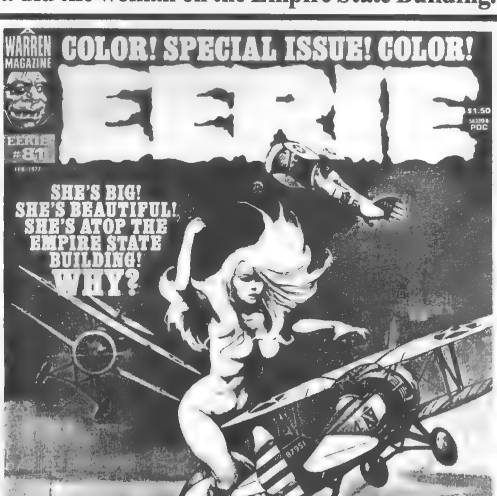
"Frazetta did the woman on the Empire State Building."

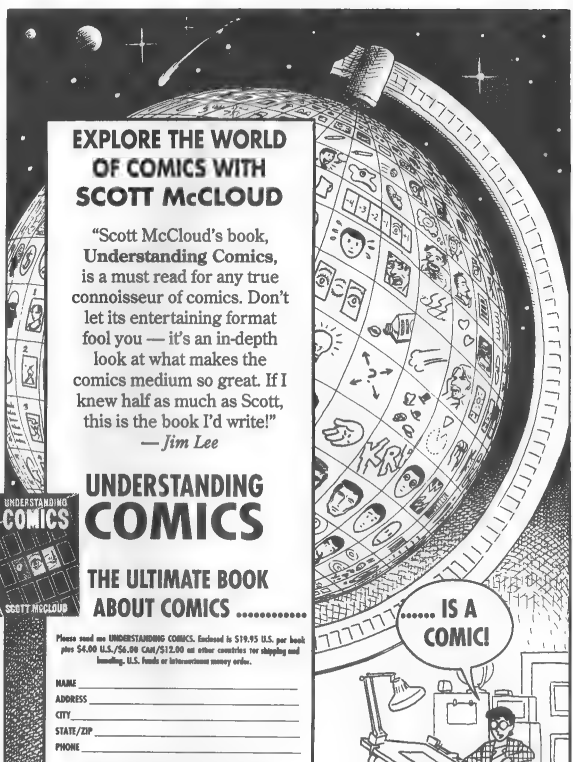


The Frank Frazetta cover that Jim Warren originally commissioned for a humor publication/ magazine — finally finding a home as the cover of EERIE #81 (1977).

JEFF: Woody Allen, yes, and **Gloria Steinem** was an assistant editor. Jim had wanted to do a humor magazine, **Frazetta** had done the cover — it was the woman on top of the Empire State Building. *(Laughter.)* It was later used on EERIE or CREEPY. But he had some great stuff! **Ralph Reese** had done some stories; they were really terrific. But he finally decided humor wasn't going to work; and, indeed, at that point the entire **Warren** empire was starting to totter a little bit. It was the expenses of doing the magazines, it was the fact that Marvel was doing them and taking up a lot of rack space. These were bad omens. There was increasing competition at that time from the beginnings of video games. Pong was just coming into existence and Atari was starting up. I think he saw the writing on the wall. If not for Captain Company, sales alone would not have kept that company afloat. Half of that stuff was cash business.

LOU: *But I thought it was great because when I was a kid it was the only place you could get a Wonder Woman model kit from Aurora.*

JEFF: Yeah. Mind you, he advertised those things before they were out; if we'd ever been investigated by the postal authorities there would have been some trouble! But his whole gig was to get those into the magazines before Woolworth's and the other stores had them.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"Stenstrum did stories like 'Asskickers of the Fantastic'"

LOU: *So he could get your money.*
JEFF: He'd get your money.
LOU: *Well, I'll tell you one funny thing on that, if you remember a story that John Severin drew and Jim Stenstrum wrote called "The Super Abnormal Phenomenon Survival Kit!" where it had this belt that had all these gimmicks you could use to save yourself from monsters, the holy water gun and all that.*
JEFF: Did you send for it? *(Laughter.)*
LOU: *Well, the thing was that at the bottom of that, just like in all the Captain Company ads, "To order these fine items take a look at our special rush order form!"* (Laughter.)
JEFF: They had some great — **Jim Stenstrum** was a terrific writer.
LOU: *I've always wondered about him.*
JEFF: Well, **Bill Dubay's** idea, and a good idea it was, was to bring **Jim Stenstrum** and **Budd Lewis**, two very good writers, up to Connecticut where **Dubay** lived, and he created a place called the Cartoon Factory there. Rented office space. He was just going to package work, high quality work, for CRAZY, Warren, CRACKED, and other magazines. And **Stenstrum** did these stories like "Rex Havoc and the Asskickers of the Fantastic!" just incredibly funny, farsighted, sophisticated stuff. Unfortunately, I think Bill didn't expect to have to underwrite these guys to the extent that he did, and it's a lot of pressure for one guy to have to drum up work for other people, plus get work done yourself. It was an enormous task. At that time he also left the company full time and **Weezie Jones** took his place, and she came in with her own people, and so it

From the June '79 issue of the sci-fi magazine 1984, a story by Jim Stenstrum (art: Abel Laxamana). This, the 6th issue of Warren's 1984, also contains an early "Mutant World" by Jan Strnad, with the amazing graphics and color artwork of Richard (DEN) Corben.

"Jim stopped coming to the office altogether.

was again a transition period. And about that time, which was the late '70s, Jim stopped coming to the office altogether, so there was really no direction. That's when the whole thing really started to fold.

LOU: *Fall to pieces.*

JEFF: Yeah, pretty dramatically.

LOU: *Okay. Since you know something of these mystery people, because mostly the Warren thing has been a mystery to me; it hasn't been covered too much in the fan press —*

JEFF: Yeah.

LOU: *I'd like to know something about — well, first, this isn't a Warren person, but Israel Waldman is even more of a mystery. He's the guy that put out all these things —*

JEFF: Reprint titles.

LOU: *All bootlegs, all bootlegs. What can you tell me about Israel?*

JEFF: Well, you know, there was a lot of that material that wasn't copyrighted. The Skywald stuff wasn't copyrighted. Sol was always paranoid about that because . . . now, I don't know the veracity of this, because once you publish it technically you own it, it's *out* there, but he was always afraid that others — because he *didn't* register them with the copyright office . . . but anyway, Israel: There had been a lot of companies that had abandoned their trademarks and their characters, so theoretically he could reprint them, and I suppose if anybody made a claim against him the best they could get would be a cease-and-desist order. He would never make a huge enough profit to make it worthwhile, but it kept *him* going.

LOU: *And, of course, he'd only reprint like three issues and stop.*

JEFF: Right, so by the time you got on his trail there would be nothing to get, he'd closed up. He was also publishing coloring books, though, which were a mainstay. He was publishing children's books. He was publishing sports magazines.

LOU: *Which titles?*

JEFF: I don't know, the yearbook type things basically. So, he was pretty diverse, and his son Herschel was working for him, and indeed Herschel is still doing this stuff. But Israel, he was very *nice*, very elegant, very European.

LOU: *Old World?*

JEFF: Yes. I always admired him very much. He was friendly. I don't think he had a creative mission or vision, but that wasn't what he was about so it was okay.

LOU: *It was strictly business.*

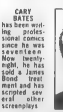
"The Bite" is another story from the mind of Rovin, this one from CREEPY #72. The art is by Jose Gual.

THE BITE
AAAGGHH
A DARK DOORWAY, CONCEALED FROM THE GAY GLITTER OF TIMES SQUARE, SWIFTLY... WITH DREAD PURPOSE... NEEDLE SHARP
DAILY NEWS
3 UNSOLVED MURDERS IN TIMES SQUARE
NEXT MORNING, A SCARESHEAD ON THE FRONT PAGE OF NEW YORK'S DAILY NEWS SET THE CITY ABLAZE WITH THE
BLOODTHIRSTY MADMAN WAS LOOSE IN MANHATTAN!
GIANTS' TACKLE: ON & OFF FIELD A THIRST FOR BLOOD?
OF COURSE, THERE WERE SOME COLUMNISTS WHO TOOK A LIGHTER VIEW OF THE MURDERS!

JEFF ROVIN

That's when the whole thing started to fold."

CARY BATES has been writing professional comics since he was seventeen. Now twenty-eight, he has sold a James Bond treatment and has scripted several other screenplays



NICOLA CUTI has been writing and editing comics for almost a decade. The thirty-two-year old writer is also an adept cartoonist / illustrator. He lives with his wife in Connecticut.

BRUCE JONES has written articles and short stories as well as comics. He's also illustrated his own books. He is now twenty-six. The thirty two year-old writer lives in Manhattan.

DAVID MICHELINE has played in rock bands, written comic material and educational films, magazine articles and comics. The twenty-eight year-old writer lives in Manhattan.

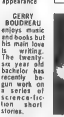
LUIS BERMEJO has had work appear in twenty countries of Europe and the Americas. An artist of truly international repute, his admirers look forward to each story's appearance

BILL DUBAY brought a new graphic look to the Warren magazines. In his four years as editor The twenty - nine year old artist / writer lives in Connecticut with his wife and two children

LOUISE JONES worked in advertising for one month before moving to Warren, where the thirty-year old editor scored an occasional story. She lives in Manhattan with her daughter

JOSE ORTIZ lives with his family in Barcelona. The forty-year-old artist spends most of his time drawing for European publications of international reputation. His work is deserved

GERRY BOUDREAU enjoys music and books but his main love is writing. The twenty-four year old bachelor has written his own series of science-fiction short stories.



DICK GIORDANO was born in 1932. He attended the School of Industrial Art and has been working in comics for the past twenty-five years, while moonlighting in advertising

GONZALO MAYO has his studio on sunny Mexico, where he lives with his wife and children. He had worked on many Warren stories and book length projects and is acclaimed!

LEOPOLD SANCHEZ began his professional career at fourteen. Since then, he has appeared in most of Europe's top twenty - eight year-old artist at present resides in Barcelona.

RICH CORBEN art is world renowned. He has appeared in magazines and books in America and Europe. The artist is on his thirties and lives with his wife and daughter in Missouri

CARMINE INFANTINO has long graced comics with his unmistakable design and storytelling. Most Warren readers grew up seeing his work and are delighted to see him at Warren

BRUCE JENNINGS works for the Lexington Herald-Leader. Here he majors in Journalism at the University of Kentucky. The twenty - six year old writer lives with his wife in Lexington

IBANEZ FERNANDEZ is renowned and well able to restructure to render anything requested by Warren's imaginative writers. This special ability has made him a personal favorite.

Staff artist Bill Mohalley produced these incomplete Warren magazine staff pictures. Many are still active.

JEFF: Strictly business with him. And, you know, I'm glad that he reprinted a lot of that stuff because it was accessible. Otherwise it would cost $100.

LOU: *And that's where you first read Jack Cole's PLASTIC MAN or THE SPIRIT?*

JEFF: Exactly!

LOU: *Okay. Other mystery men — James Warren himself. He was the guy that put out the best horror books of the '60s, CREEPY and EERIE. Tell me something about him.*

JEFF: Jim Warren was one of the most fascinating, frustrating, generous, hostile . . .

LOU: *Enigmatic?*

JEFF: No, he wasn't enigmatic. Just one of the most *truly* fascinating people. He always wanted to be **Hugh Hefner**; that was his goal in life. He was fortunate in that **Bud Messing,** who owned World Color Press, which was one of the two largest printing companies in America, and obviously in the *world*, took a liking to him very early on. It was a real father/son relationship. So, Jim had published AFTER HOURS, that PLAYBOY clone which failed, and he had published HELP which was fascinating and wonderful but failed, and **Messing** extended him credit to do FAMOUS MONSTERS. Without **Messing**'s credit there would have been no FAMOUS MONSTERS. Basically, he said, "Go ahead, we'll pay for printing it, and if you make money you'll pay me back." *That* was the heart of the relationship for the next 26 years or so; if **Warren** went through a rough time **Messing** would be there to underwrite him. So, although **Warren** was a wizard in many ways, a lot of his fortitude came from the fact that he knew he had *that* cushion. But in saying that I don't mean to take anything away from him, because *he* had *vision!* People always say he was a businessman, he was crude, he was this and that — he was *smart* enough and had enough *taste* to go for the *best!*

LOU: *That's very true.*

JEFF: There were times when he — for example, when his fiancee left him, when he was *devastated* — he disappeared for days and nobody knew where he was. He used to hang out with a group called **The Fuggs.**

LOU: *The musical group?*

JEFF: Right. I think if you talked with **Billy Graham** or **Archie Goodwin** you will find he was also not around a lot during *that* time. You know, he would make appointments with **Forry Ackerman** and never show up.

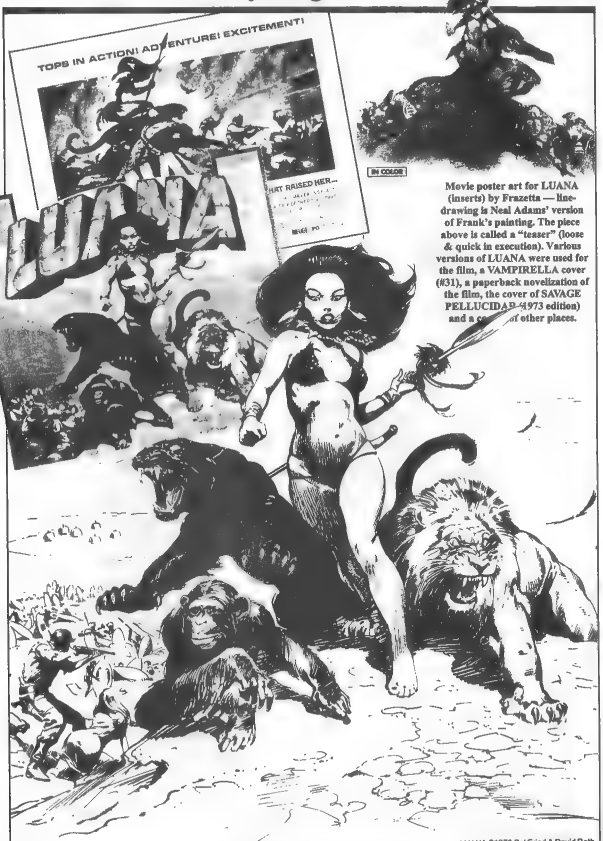
LOU: *We're going to have to check the credits on some of those Fuggs albums, see if there's a "Thanks to Jim Warren" or something.*

JEFF: *(Laughter.)* So, from the late '60s to the early '70s was really kind of a rocky time for Warren Publishing.

LOU: *Was that the time when basically Archie and Al and most of the artists of that great first generation left?*

JEFF: Yeah, pretty much. And there were all the things . . . I forget which artist it was, maybe **Mastroserio,** who died, and so **Warren** didn't want to pay for a job that he had finished. So, I think at that

"Warren would do anything for a Frazetta cover. He



Movie poster art for LUANA (inserts) by Frazetta — line-drawing is Neal Adams' version of Frank's painting. The piece above is called a "teaser" (loose & quick in execution). Various versions of LUANA were used for the film, a VAMPIRELLA cover (#31), a paperback novelization of the film, the cover of SAVAGE PELLUCIDAR (1973 edition) and a couple of other places.

LUANA ©1973 Sol Fried & David Roth

adapted LUANNA because Frazetta did the poster."

point **Harlan Ellison** and a whole bunch of other people got on his case, and he lost a lot of talented people at that point. *But,* Jim was the one who really started **Frazetta.** Think about it.

LOU: *Yeah, all the old covers for CREEPY and EERIE.*

JEFF: He had done Ace book covers and things, but it was those Warren magazine covers that really took off.

LOU: *Screaming out at you.*

JEFF: Which led to the posters, and that led to the Conan stuff which, of course, made **Frazetta.**

LOU: *That stuff is still being reprinted on album covers, stuff that started on old CREEPY and EERIE covers.*

JEFF: Right, by **Frazetta.** And **Warren** would do *anything,* after a while, to have a **Frazetta** cover. He even bought that awful movie LUANNA and did an adaptation because **Frazetta** had done the *poster* for the movie — because he wanted to print the poster as a cover! *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Now we know why!*

JEFF: Exactly. That was the reason.

LOU: *VAMPIRELLA?*

JEFF: He wanted to do a BARBARELLA type of comic book because that was another **Hefner**esque real chic French publication. But if you stripped away that ego aspect of him, he really did have good taste. His taste in movies was very good; he was really enthusiastic about movies. He would call me up at midnight and say, "You've gotta see BLAZING SADDLES!" or "I'm watching CITIZEN KANE — why are you sleeping?" *(Laughter.)* But you didn't mind because his enthusiasm was just so great for these things. He *treasured* the fact that he had met **Buster Crabbe.** He fancied himself **Buster Crabbe;** he wanted to *be* Flash Gordon. There was just this incredible element of *fun* to him. Now, he could also cut you off at the knees and stomp on you as you fell. Artists would come in with their portfolios and he would reach into his desk and pull out a rubber stamp, "BULLSHIT" right over their artwork. He had a phone in his office, his private line, and it would ring and he'd pick it up, "Bet you've got the wrong number!" — *Wham! (Laughter.)*

LOU: *I love it.*

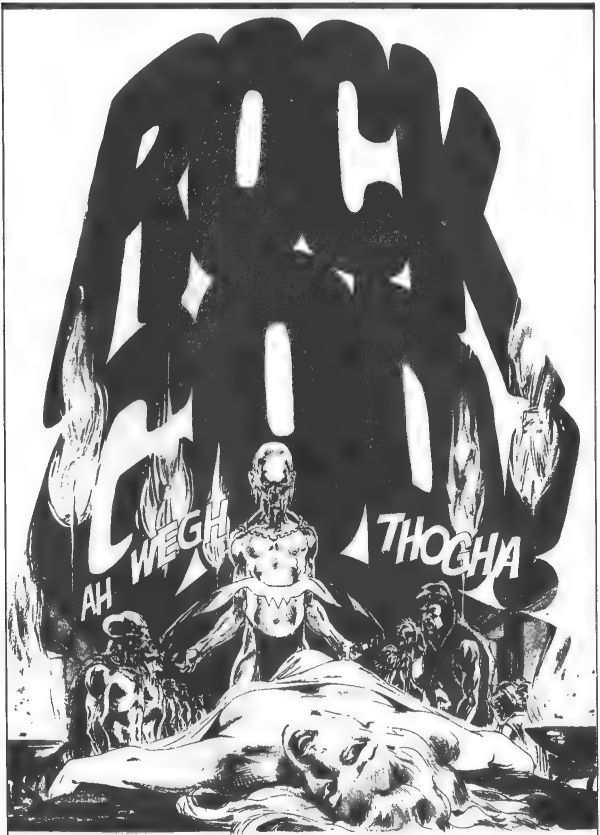
JEFF: He once called the operator — he was really in a hurry, called the operator and asked her to dial a number and she said he could dial it direct, and he said, "I'm a Korean War veteran; my arms were blown off; now *get* me the damn number!" *(Laughter.)* He was really fast, and he could be cruel. But he could be generous. If we worked hard he bought us theater tickets, great seats, sent a limousine to collect us. So, the bottom line with Jim is that if you got to know him you couldn't hate him; you just really had to admire him. And he put his money where his mouth is. Even though he had the cushion, he stood personally to lose. He had a nice apartment in the city, a house in the Hamptons, a World War I plane, and he stood to lose all of that by taking some of the gambles. Unfortunately, when he moved out to the Hamptons he really got involved in that Hamptons crowd, and that's really trendy and nouveau riche, a lot of it.

LOU: *Life in the fast lane and all that good stuff?*

JEFF: And that ruined him. He already had a proclivity in that direction, and as

An early cover (#3) by Frank Frazetta. (Our CI #42 and Special Edition are collector's items — look for 'em!)

"The pictures with bodies and explosions were very real."



The story "Rock God" ©1960 Harlan Ellison

"He had scramblers on the phone. He started to lose it."

soon as he was moving with **Senator Moynihan** and was involved with that campaign, and was involved with raising money for **Cliff Robertson** to do a movie, and after a while I think the magazines bored him. And, again, I think he saw, with Atari coming up and that, I think he saw that publishing was not for him. The real betrayal was to all the people who loved him and worked hard for him and were devoted to him, who he let down by just disappearing.

LOU: *I can't let you get away without telling the story about Jim Warren and the Six Day War.*

JEFF: Sure, sure. As soon as Israel was invaded he *shot* over there; he was over there like a rocket. His mentor **Bud Messing** had powerful friends . . . I don't know if he was **Messing's** son or stepson or son-in-law, or maybe he was just a big brother to someone, but the guy was big in the FBI and he cleared the way for Jim to go over right away. Now, you know, we never knew to what extent Jim did fighting, but the pictures that came back were awfully convincing. *(Laughter.)* A couple, maybe he did pose in the tank, but there were combat photos.

LOU: *Was he commander of a tank or something?*

JEFF: He was in a tank. Keep in mind, if you're Jewish and you go to Israel you can be a citizen, so it's not unusual.

LOU: *Dual citizenship.*

JEFF: You can have it, right, so it would not have been inconceivable that he would have gone over and fought. And the pictures with the dead bodies and the smoke and explosions were all very real. After he came back, he was convinced there was an Arab cell chasing him. **Messing** had the FBI check on it. Well, they checked on it by *following* him. **Warren** didn't *know* that the FBI was tailing him; he became convinced that they were the Arabs. *(Laughter.)* It became this sort of self-fulfilling prophesy.

LOU: *"They may not look Arab but they are!"*

JEFF: Yeah, right! *(Laughter.)* "But of *course* they don't *look* Arab!" He had scramblers on his phone. That was where he really started to lose it. And then he really was offended when the hostages were taken in Iran; that really killed him. He was so upset about that. He ran another one of his editorials, showed guys carrying garbage in the U.S. flag, and he was so annoyed and angry and helpless; he just wanted to do *something*. He was overwhelmed. And *then*, the coup de gras, was when **Bill Dubay** did a comic-book adaptation of "A Boy and His Dog."

LOU: *Which was unauthorized?*

JEFF: Which was not authorized. He killed it by changing it slightly into a girl and her monster. Well, Harlan came after him with legal artillery.

LOU: *And, of course, he had done that great story with Harlan and Neal Adams, published "Rock God."*

JEFF: But there was a problem over that. I don't remember what it was, but they were angry at him from *those* days. Well,

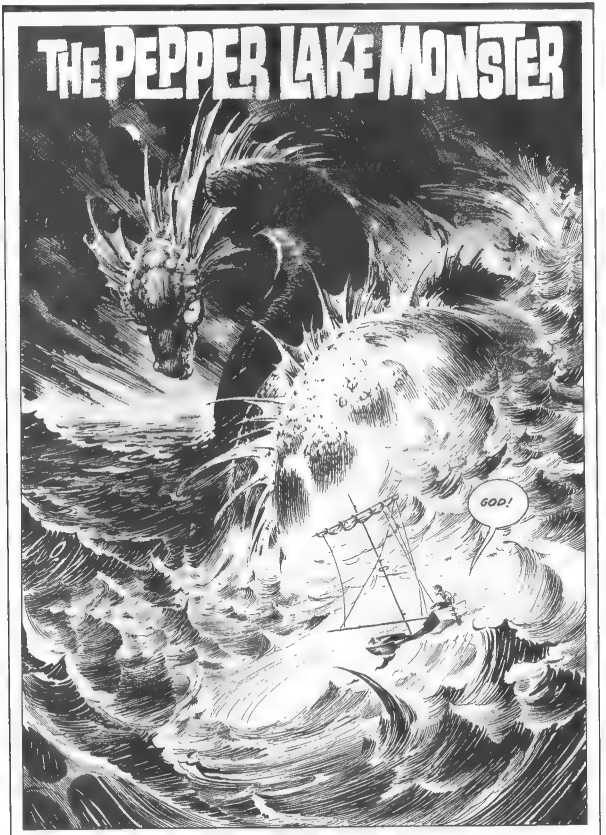
Ellison: "My work is writing. It's also my pleasure. I'm 35, and have this portrait on my wall; I keep getting younger, but the portrait is decaying hideously."

Frazetta: "My first love is comic art. Probably always will be. Men who've inspired me. Michael Salanga, Hal Foster—both truly great artists. My second love is drawing the female form. Can't you tell? Altho, some days I'd rather be playing baseball for the Yankees."

Adams: I guess I'm really 3 different people . . . a quiet, serious student of good literature & art; also a guy who loves to draw pictures and convey ideas through the comic medium. The third Adams produces storyboards for television and illustrations for N.Y. ad agencies. Someday "all 3 of us" will work on a project we'll all enjoy."

These two pages: Neal Adams' wash artwork for Harlan Ellison's story "Rock God." Strangely enough, this story was based on a painting that Frank Frazetta had done (insert above). Frazetta, Ellison, Adams together!

"Warren was at his own bankruptcy sale and



bought some of his furniture back. *(Laughter.)*"

Previous page: splash from just one of the many Bernie Wrightson b&w stories done during Jeff's time there. And here we have Wrightson inking the pencils of Carmine (THE FLASH) Infantino. Both are from Warren magazines.

he had **Warren** dead to rights on this one.

LOU: *Yeah.*

JEFF: Warren's lawyer called me, said, "You've read a lot of fiction. What do you think? Do you think we can get through this?" Frankly, no I didn't. It *was* "A Boy and His Dog" and they just changed it a little bit.

LOU: *And it's not like Harlan is the most shrinking author.*

JEFF: It's not like **Van Vogt's** work being used for ALIEN.

LOU: *Right.*

JEFF: Harlan Ellison. Bill hadn't wanted to write off the artwork, which was done, and he figured he'd made enough changes. But the *prospect* of losing to Harlan was . . . he felt *ashamed* about it, I think, like he'd lost the big one. So, it was this *massive*, incredible combination of things that undid Warren, I think.

LOU: *In the late '70s, early '80s.*

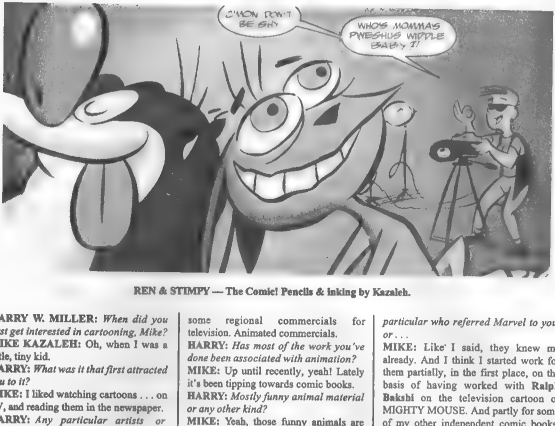
JEFF: This was in '82.

LOU: *That's sad.*

JEFF: After the place was closed **Warren** was at his own bankruptcy sale and bought some of his own furniture back. *(Laughter.)* Ironically, he's come out of hiding. He had lunch with **Bill Mohalley,** who was the art director, back in December of '92. Mohalley said he seemed to be very calm and interested in getting back into publishing. I can't imagine that he will be happy to see FM being published by someone else.

Coming in Part Two: Atlas Comics tales, reconciliation with Warren, OMNI interviews, and THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SUPERHEROES.

"I like animation. Particularly Warner Bros. and Hanna-Barbera."



REN & STIMPY — The Comic! Pencils & inking by Kazaleh.

HARRY W. MILLER: *When did you first get interested in cartooning, Mike?*

MIKE KAZALEH: Oh, when I was a little, tiny kid.

HARRY: *What was it that first attracted you to it?*

MIKE: I liked watching cartoons . . . on TV, and reading them in the newspaper.

HARRY: *Any particular artists or studios whose work influenced you when you were first starting out as an artist?*

MIKE: I liked so many things, mostly animation. Particularly Warner Bros. and Hanna-Barbera. DePatie-Freleng's Pink Panther, I particularly loved. And also **Jay Ward's** ROCKY & BULLWINKLE.

HARRY: *Did you have any formal training in art, or was it mostly on-the-job experience?*

MIKE: The only training I ever had was drawing blueprints in a high school course.

HARRY: *Well, what was some of the first professional work you did?*

MIKE: Aside from some odds and ends, the first pro work I did was producing some regional commercials for television. Animated commercials.

HARRY: *Has most of the work you've done been associated with animation?*

MIKE: Up until recently, yeah! Lately it's been tipping towards comic books.

HARRY: *Mostly funny animal material or any other kind?*

MIKE: Yeah, those funny animals are my favorites. I was doing some of my own funny animal stuff for fun for a while. I'd like to go back to doing that.

HARRY: *How did you come to get the job doing the REN & STIMPY title for Marvel?*

MIKE: Let's see . . . How did that happen? Well, I was working for them before on other books. I started working for them right about the time **Sid Jacobsen** left Marvel.

HARRY: *What other material did you do for Marvel before?*

MIKE: I did MIGHTY MOUSE . . . and a character called Teddy Dustbin which was a feature in a book called EPIC LITE — a one-shot.

HARRY: *Was there anyone in particular who referred Marvel to you, or . . .*

MIKE: Like' I said, they knew me already. And I think I started work for them partially, in the first place, on the basis of having worked with **Ralph Bakshi** on the television cartoon of MIGHTY MOUSE. And partly for some of my other independent comic books, like CAPTAIN JACK.

HARRY: *I understand Bakshi's MIGHTY MOUSE toon was one of your favorite projects. How many of the animators on that went on to help produce the REN & STIMPY cartoons?*

MIKE: There were some people — **John Kricfalusi, Jim Gomez, Lynn Navier, Jim Smith** and probably a few others.

HARRY: *How does the REN & STIMPY comic square with the animated feature, and do the editor-in-chief, Tom DeFalco, and the editor, Fabian Nicieza, define any guidelines for the comic in this respect?*

MIKE: Nah. We're just trying to make it funny, that's all.

HARRY: *What about the time*

MIKE KAZALEH

REN & STIMPY TM & © 1994 Nickelodeon / MIGHTY MOUSE TM & © 1994 Viacom International, Inc. / HYPER-AL © 1988 Mike Kazaleh / CRITTERS © 1988-94 Fantagraphics Books / HAM HAM COMICS © 1992 Fantagraphics Books / CAPTAIN JACK © 1994 Mike Kazaleh.

"Marvel has to get Nickelodeon to approve everything."

constraints you have to work under for the comic as compared to those in producing an animated feature?

MIKE: Well, it depends on how you look at it. Normally in animation the time is kind of tight. But, on that particular show, when John was doing it, he was taking his good ol' time, and delivering shows months late. That's why he's not working on it anymore.

So . . . the time is very tough. Marvel usually has two or three weeks to do an issue of it, and I have to work very quickly.

HARRY: *What kind of production procedure do you use in putting the comic book together?*

MIKE: Well, they send an outline of the plot. By the time it gets to me, it's already been looked at by Nickelodeon.

HARRY: *Oh, Nickelodeon looks at it too?*

MIKE: Nickelodeon looks at it, yeah!

HARRY: *Is this some kind of deal Marvel has with Nickelodeon to put out the book?*

MIKE: Marvel has to get Nickelodeon to approve everything. The Marvel people are editing it, but since the characters are owned by Nickelodeon, they have to look at everything and okay it.

HARRY: *How do you dialogue or coordinate with Dan Slott, the writer of the book, in order to finish fleshing out the final product?*

MIKE: Well, like I said, he sends the plot. Usually, at this point, we talk on the phone about it. Then I rough the entire story out, real rough . . . on typewriter paper. And then I draw the pages up with no dialogue — some of the sound effects.

HARRY: *So, when you're finished, you send the art to Dan?*

MIKE: Yeah.

HARRY: *How much leeway do you have with the visuals, or does he give you some kind of guidelines?*

MIKE: He gives me some guidelines . . . but I can make up a lot of it.

HARRY: *Do you think your background in animation has influenced the style you use in doing comics in general, and this one in particular? And how so, if you think it does?*

MIKE: Well, yeah. I think it does.

HARRY: *Could you be more specific?*

MIKE: I don't know. I'm just drawing it the way I like to draw.

HARRY: *It just seems to me that over the past few years I've come to notice that the artists with background in animation tend to have a simpler, purer kind of functional line with a stronger three-dimensional effect than the standard comics artist. Of course, that's a complete generalization — just my observation.*

But, your work is also different from the usual in that you both pencil and ink it. I guess you like that? You wouldn't consider having someone else ink it?

MIKE: I won't use an inker if I don't have to, even though I know a lot of people who are good. For one thing, I like to ink. For another, I think I can do better drawings that way, because I can pencil rather loose. And that gives you a little bit freer looking ink line.

HARRY: *Speaking of that — what kind of tools, brush or pen, do you like to work with?*

MIKE: I use mostly a number two sable brush. I have a whole bunch of pens sitting by where I work. And I use a whole variety of pens for different things, but most of the figure work is done with a brush.

HARRY: *Do you do many preliminary roughs? You said that you send to . . .*

MIKE: No, I don't send them. I just do them so I know what I'm drawing.

HARRY: *Are there any qualities you try to embody in the characters? You know, this kind of frenetic, hyper character of Ren and so forth?*

MIKE: Just hyper when they ought to be

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Cover from the tenth issue of Marvel's MIGHTY MOUSE by Kevin Maguire.

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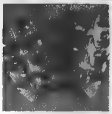

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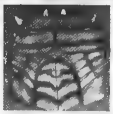

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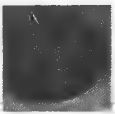

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"I wish they would use a little less of the shading."

hyper and not when they shouldn't. They shouldn't be hyper all of the time or it won't be funny!

HARRY: *In the animated feature I've noticed they create a strong, weird visual effect, almost surreal in nature, by juxtaposing simple cartoon images with highly detailed, airbrushed realistic ones. Do you think you might use a similar effect in the comics stories?*

MIKE: Well, if there's a good reason for it. I don't really plan it. But if there's a good reason to do something like that, then we'll do something like that.

HARRY: *Are you responsible at all for any of the shading effects in the images or are they the province of your talented colorist, Ed Lazarelli?*

MIKE: That's the province of the colorist.

HARRY: *You do have to have some idea of the shading effects he might use in order to know how the linework and details need to be handled, right?*

MIKE: Wrong! I just draw it. Actually, I wish they would use a little less of the shading.

HARRY: *Do you think that there's anything about your rendition of REN & STIMPY that's unique, so that if a comics connoisseur were looking at your work a hundred years from today they'd say — "Oh, look. That's a REN & STIMPY by Mike Kazaleh"?*

MIKE: What was the question?

HARRY: *Do you think there's anything distinctive about your way of handling the characters . . . from a visual point of view?*

MIKE: Well, I hope so! I don't know of anything in particular. I just hope that it's got a different flavor, because I think that's a good quality for anybody's artwork, if it has some of their own flavor to it.

HARRY: *I'd like to know who came up with the nifty newspaper collage idea for the art in the Yule Log story in the third*

MIGHTY MOUSE
"SURVIVAL OF THE HIPPEST"
I'M GONNA GRATE YOU TWO INTO A MILLION MOUTH-SIZED MOUSE BITS!
THE COW'S FINALLY FLIPPED HIS MILK LID, MIGHTY MOUSE!
CAN YOU GET US OUT OF THIS?
I DON'T KNOW PEARL, NEVER BEFORE HAVE I FACED A GRATER THREAT!
DAN SLOTT WRITER
MIKE KAZALEH PENCILER
MARIE SEVERIN INKER
EVAN SKOLNICK COLORIST
BARRY SORICH LETTERS
FABIAN NICIEZA EDITOR
TOM DEFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF

Mike's splash art from MIGHTY MOUSE #10. Inks by Marie Severin, sister of John.

"I don't come up with a technique, then figure how to use it."

issue. When I finally put the small print under the ol' magnifying glass, I was amused to find that, while Stimpy was out trying to buy a log, Ren was reading articles about animation in general and The REN & STIMPY show in particular. I thought that was a great idea! Whoever came to think of that idea?

MIKE: It was me. Ha! It was from an article in the L.A. TIMES.

HARRY: *Did that inspire you to put it in there . . . when you saw the article first?*

MIKE: Oh no, it's just I'm too lazy to print the writing in the newspaper, so I thought I'd paste in the newspaper instead.

HARRY: *Got any more innovative technical devices up your sleeves you might want to spring on us in future issues borrowed from Picasso or somebody?*

MIKE: I don't know. I try to work very loose on it till I get an idea like that newspaper collage. But I don't come up first with a technique and then figure how to use it. I work and I put it in. If I think it's funny, I'll use it.

HARRY: *I understand you made an appearance at a comics convention in Houston. How did that go?*

MIKE: Well, it went all right.

HARRY: *Were all of the fans after you for your REN & STIMPY drawings?*

MIKE: Yeah! Some of them were readers, and some of them were

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I NEVER REALLY WANTED TO SET THE WORLD ON FIRE...

Fantagraphics Books' HAR*HAR COMICS cover by Mike (featuring Kazaleh's own "Hyper Al Goes Latin" and "Hyper Al's Big Day").

CRITTERS cover by Mike Kazaleh — circa 1989 (Fantagraphics Books).

"I prefer the readers to the speculators."

speculators.

HARRY: *Speculators! Well, how does it feel to get the nice acceptance for the REN & STIMPY material you're getting from comics fans nowadays?*

MIKE: I prefer the readers to the speculators!

HARRY: *But whatever their motives are, you know they have some kind of appreciation for your work, huh?*

MIKE: Yeah.

HARRY: *It ought to be some kind of satisfaction to know that these fans, many of whom are characterized as "zombies" more or less addicted to superhero comics, feel the way they do about your REN & STIMPY title.*

How does it feel to be working in comics now as opposed to animation as far as freedom or variety or change of pace or whatever?

MIKE: Well, with comics it depends a lot on what project you get into. Because if you get into a licensed comic book like with the Warner Bros. people, then you'd go through the same headaches as you'd go through in animation., about the regulations and style guides and approval. In comics it depends on what you're doing. We happen to have a certain amount of leeway with this comic book . . . which is a little unusual with a color funnybook.

HARRY: *So you feel that if you were doing a comic put out by Warner Bros. it would be a lot more restrictive than this book being put out by Marvel, huh?*

MIKE: Yeah. It would be almost as bad as working on one of the television shows.

HARRY: *Well what about the people you have to work with in putting out this comic? Is it a lot easier to work, and you all have pretty good rapport?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah, yeah. With the Marvel people. Especially them! With the writer, **Dan Slott**, and the editor, **Fabian Nicieza** . . . if we've got a story problem, we just sit and talk till we figure out what to do with it.

HARRY: *That's mostly between you and the writer?*

MIKE: Well, between me, the writer and the editor. Well . . . I don't know how to describe it, but it's been fun to deal with them. You can say you work with them.

HARRY: *Do you have any other projects comin' down the pike?*

MIKE: I have no idea. I know it's slated from day to day.

HARRY: *Do you have any words of wisdom for your throngs of fans out there waiting with baited breath?*

MIKE: I don't know. Just anyone who likes to draw, just draw what you like. That's what I'm trying to do with whatever I draw as much as anyone would let me. I try to draw the way that I like to draw the best . . . and in this book here, they're letting me draw the way that I like to draw.

HARRY: *Have you ever done any type of work very different from REN & STIMPY, superheroes or . . .*

MIKE: I did some of that kind of stuff in animation. I did some of the MIGHTY MUTANIMALS for Archie. It was a funny animal comic.

HARRY: *When was that?*

MIKE: That was pretty recently. For a while I was doing them both at the same time as REN & STIMPY, but I think they've just discontinued the book.

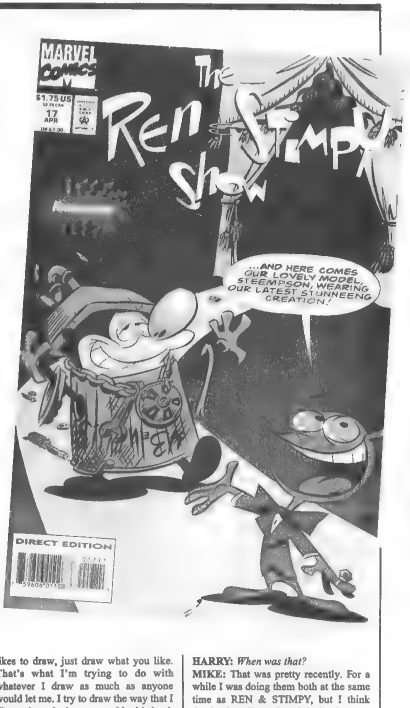
HARRY: *What other comics did you do? Didn't you do CAPTAIN JACK? Whose material was that?*

MIKE: That was my own material.

HARRY: *Your own creation and all. And who published that?*

MIKE: Fantagraphics.

HARRY: *Oh, they do publish some unusual material. I'm sorry to say I*



"I've been collecting slot cars for 20 years."

haven't had a chance to see your CAPTAIN JACK material, but I'd like to see it.

MIKE: I did CAPTAIN JACK and HAR*HAR for them.

HARRY: *What was HAR*HAR?*

MIKE: It was this disjointed bunch of gags. Some of them were one page, but some went on for a few pages.

HARRY: *What genre was it? Funny animal?*

MIKE: Yeah. I don't know how to describe it. It was just a funny book.

HARRY: *When were HAR*HAR and CAPTAIN JACK put out?*

MIKE: We were printing them from . . . CAPTAIN JACK from '86 to . . . the first one, I was drawing in '85. The first issue came out in '86. And I think they printed them as far as the beginning of '91.

HARRY: *About how many issues of that came out?*

MIKE: Twelve regular issues, and two specials.

HARRY: *Were they all black and white?*

MIKE: Yes. They were black and white. We had two issues of HAR*HAR. The last one came out this year.

HARRY: *That's interesting — for people who want to follow your work and know what to look for.*

So, can you think of any more particular titles or is that mainly what you've done in comics?

MIKE: Sometimes I did work on Fantagraphics' CRITTERS, which was their funny animal anthology. I did some work for Disney Comics. Very little.

HARRY: *Oh, really? What was that?*

MIKE: I did some work on Roger Rabbit, and Goofy, and Donald Duck. Some of it never saw print.

HARRY: *Well, I'm glad to know that. It'll help me and others get a handle on a lot of the other material we didn't know you'd done. I'll have to look some of that up myself.*

When you're not busy drawing comics, do you have any hobbies you enjoy?

MIKE: Yeah. I have toy race cars.

HARRY: *Are they electric? Are they radio controlled or do they run down a slot?*

MIKE: They're slot cars. I've been collecting them for 20 years, and just recently I've started trying to hop 'em up.

HARRY: *Those little things are so small that when they get to going very fast you can't even see 'em.* (Laughter.)

MIKE: Well, the first time I built one of those fast jobs, I was getting dizzy from following it around the track.

HARRY: *Well, your interest in model cars explains why you did such a good job drawing the cover of REN & STIMPY #4, featuring a nice, impressive foreshortened view of a car coming head-on toward the viewer. Did you copy that car from one of your toys?*

MIKE: No. I made that one up. But it is

"It's fun to draw cars, since I enjoy my toy ones."

THIS!
NO WAY!
THAT'S GREAT, REN!
NOW EVERYONE CAN BE TRENDY WITHOUT PAYIN THOSE HIGH DESIGNER FASHION PRICES!
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SHUT UP.
END

fun for me to draw cars, since I enjoy racing my toy ones so much.

HARRY: *I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me, Mike. Much continued success with your REN & STIMPY work and whatever else comes down the pike. Maybe it will be a hot rod type comic. You might just be the perfect guy for the job!*

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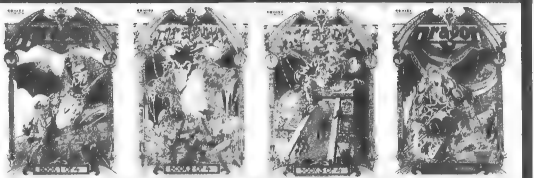

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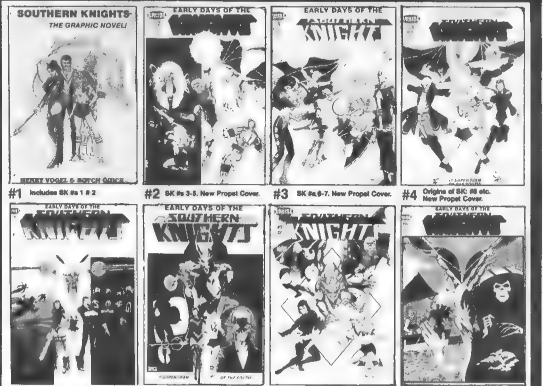
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STAR TREK: NOVEL IDEAS

Dear David & Darrel,

After reading the **Majel Barrett Roddenberry** interview (would it have killed you to include a recent photo of her?) I felt I had to write. It's obvious she never really read the STAR TREK novels published by Bantam and Pocket Books, a division of Paramount. I've read all of them. Kirk never had other children, except the son that was established in STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN. Kirk never had other wives, except Liana, a character Gene created for STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE, who was dropped from the film yet appeared in the novelization. It's true that all the books don't fit into one another but that's not such a bad thing. It would help if the editors at Pocket made an effort to keep some kind of continuity between books, but then again, not all the books are written by one author and while not all of them are amazing, not all of them are bad either. In fact, if Paramount were really smart, they would base the first NEXT GENERATION movie on **Peter David's** VENDETTA. That's an amazing novel.

Delmo (The Saint) Walters Jr.
1831 White Plains Road #1B
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ROBIN WILLIAMS: RIDDLER — OR RIDDLED WITH BULLETS?

Dear Editor,

I would like to address the highly reported rumor that **Robin Williams** will be cast as the Riddler in BATMAN 3. I think it would be a bad mistake. Contrary to popular opinion, **Williams** is not right to play the Riddler. First, I feel he would camp it up too much. I really doubt he would take such a film seriously. Secondly, I don't think he could do an action drama. He may be a fair dramatic actor, when he takes the subject matter seriously, but his two previous action films, POPEYE and HOOK, have failed . . . he's just not right for the genre. Thirdly, and the biggest problem I have with **Williams**, is that except for POPEYE, **Williams** can never stay in character. Just when you start to get into the movie, he ruins it by going into his "**Robin Williams** schtick." Just once, I'd like to see him make it through a film without resorting to that tired **Reagan** imitation.

I think there are at least half a dozen actors who would be superb as the Riddler. My personal favorite is also a name **Tim Burton** once mentioned and is getting a lot of support from fans — **Mickey Dolenz**. He would be brilliant in the part — he's creatively crazy and a high-energy performer. He would add a lot to the role. Plus you could cast **Danny Bonaduce** as his henchman. Other good choices to play the Riddler are **Christopher Lloyd** (he'd be excellent), **Charles Groden, James Belushi, James Carrey**, or how about the master himself, **Frank Gorshin**.

But not **Robin Williams**. He's just not right for the character. He's much better suited to play the Green Goblin over in **James Cameron's** SPIDER-MAN movie (now there's something to think about!!).

Christina Tobias
Toledo, OH

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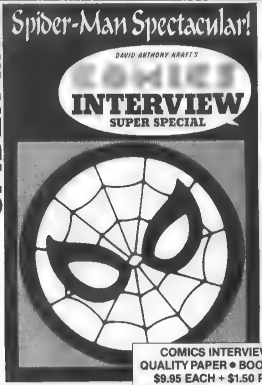

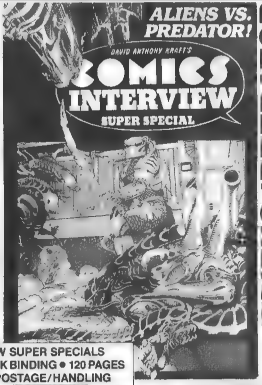

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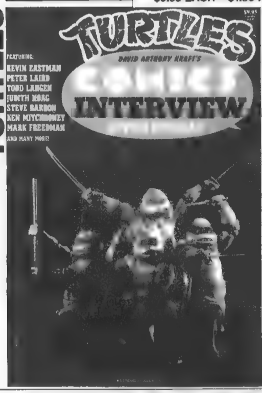

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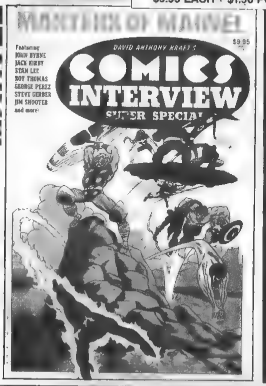

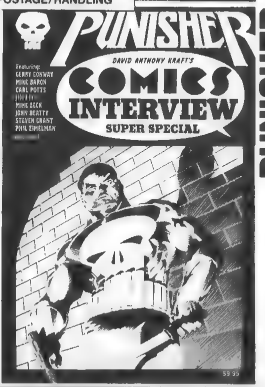

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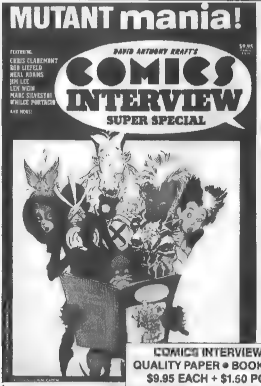

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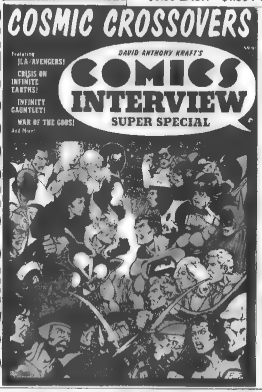

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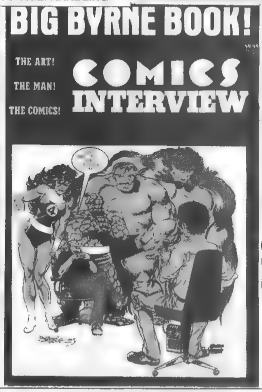

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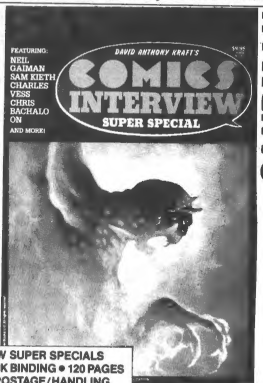

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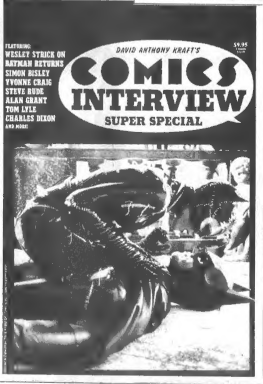

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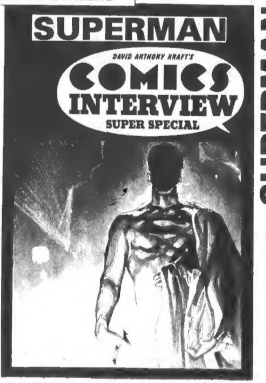

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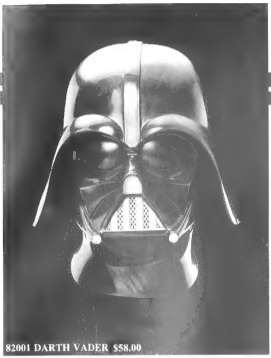

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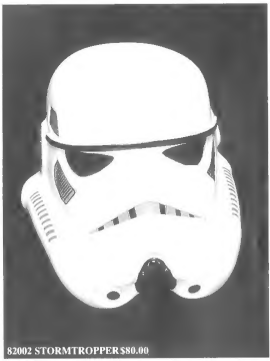

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